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BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for **MEN**, *by* **MEN**



Scots Hidalgo

A gay Caledonian fights to free the New World from Old Spain. A novel,

by ACHMED ABDULLAH

•

Nothing in the Rules

A sinful Centaur invades a modern race-track.

by NELSON BOND

•

Special Mission

A young Signal Corps officer deals with a strange murder mystery. A complete novel,

by RICHARD SALE

Who's Who *in this* Issue

"Flying Officer X"



Photo © Yvonne Gregory, London

HERBERT ERNEST BATES, one of the most skillful short-story writers of our day, was born in Rushden, rural England, in 1905. Here, during his early childhood, he spent long and wonderful hours in the company of his grandfather, the intimate of gypsies and prize-fighters. The grown man and successful author says he owes this companion of his childhood an unfathomable debt of gratitude.

Still in his early thirties, Bates is the author of ten volumes of short stories—eleven of which have been included in the anthology *The Best Short Stories*—and of a play and several novels. In the autumn of 1941 he was commissioned as Flying Officer X by the British Government and was stationed with the Bomber Command to study the men of the R.A.F. in and out of action. "There's Something in the Air" is his first book written under that assignment.



William Makin

THE well-remembered author who gave us the "Red Wolf of Arabia" stories is serving in his second World War, although he has seen and shared several other conflicts. He was a student in Paris when the first World War broke out, and subsequently fought in the British Army until he was wounded and gassed at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He began a journalistic career on the Manchester *Guardian,* then went to the Orient as a correspondent. Occupying Rudyard Kipling's old newspaper office in Allahabad, he reported the Punjab Revolt, and began writing fiction. Journeying through Burma and Malaya to China, he joined Sun Yat-sen and his rebel army in Canton. Still later, on the staff of the London Daily *Mail,* he was in South Africa during the Rand Revolt of 1922. In 1931 he was wounded by a stray bullet while covering a revolution in Portugal.

At the beginning of this second World War, he served for a time charting submarine reports in London, but soon was sent to the Near East on what he described as a "sticky job." Now, after two years of silence, he sends us from Cairo the story "Desert Nurse," which begins on page 22.

Phil Magee



HAVE been in and around the Army for more than eighteen years; four of them pounding my arches with the infantry up and down the East Coast. In fact, it was while I was doing it "by the numbers" in the Tidewater section of Virginia that I acquired the lady who now manages both me and a sixteen-year-old son.

Shortly after this acquisition I abandoned a military career for the prospect of becoming rich *via* the Florida real-estate boom. It was a nice try.

Re-entered the service in 1928, this time as a civilian with the Quartermaster Corps. Been with 'em ever since. Came to the Pacific Coast in 1931, and am at present at a Southern California Post.

Wouldn't change jobs with Paul McNutt. I've been rubbing elbows with doughboys, red-legs, cosmoline-slingers and hoss soldiers a good part of my life now, and they're the grandest guys in the world.

I don't catch on fast, and it was only a couple of years ago that it occurred to me the general public might like to know something about the boys who make our war machine tick.

Oh, yes; I was born in Boston forty years ago.

BLUE BOOK

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READERS' COMMENT

NOT MUCH SERMON MATERIAL

How many among the clergy, I wonder, read BLUE BOOK? *It has been a source of real relaxation and entertainment for me. Yours are always good clean stories, and in my visits to hospitals I can always recommend* BLUE BOOK *without any hesitation. And almost twenty years ago, when I was in college, I remember our very noted professor of English telling his class that* BLUE BOOK *was the best magazine of its kind.*

I like your war stories. They are not only up with the war news, but sometimes they are far ahead of it. And your mystery stories, especially "Murder in the Blackout," are just tops to me.

Thanks too for publishing high spots from Herbert Agar's "A Time for Greatness," a "must" book for every intelligent citizen. Your summary should make many want to read the whole thing.

Of course I value BLUE BOOK *mostly for the stories. I usually like to take my history "straight," so also my social ideas. No, I don't find much sermon material; but clergy are human and they enjoy just plain good reading too.*

W. Owings Stone,
Baltimore.

CLERK AND WOODSMAN

Once on the subway in New York City I saw an anemic little clerk avidly reading one of H. Bedford-Jones' stories in BLUE BOOK. *High in the Sierras a few months later I found a giant red-bearded woodsman just as absorbed in the same story and same magazine. Then I realized that my favorite magazine was confined to no one class of men. It appealed to men and women everywhere whose spirit of adventure was still dominant despite smothering influences of civilization.*

After reading BLUE BOOK *for ten years without missing an issue, the only major change, so far as I can see, is in the size. Many magazines change their editorial policy often. Yet* BLUE BOOK *has maintained the same high reader-interest throughout the years, depending upon superlative stories to hold its readers instead of eye-catching physical changes, such as loud covers, contests, etc.*

May you keep on publishing it the same old way with the top-notch writers of the nation authoring the stories, and the kicks in this department will be few and weak.

Cleve Jennings,
Paint Rock, Texas.

SCOTS HIDALGO



Illustrated by John Fulton

HERE on the outskirts of Lima, with its maze of crooked, coiling streets and alleys, its low white flat-roofed houses, its gardens ablaze with peach and quince and almond, the palace of the Viceroy of Peru swept east and west in a huge avalanche of gray granite and snowy masonry, topped by turreted battlements and surrounded by a vast park.

At the gate that, flanked by broad stone pillars, pierced the outer wall, a sergeant jumped to attention and thrust out his halberd.

"Halt!" his voice peaked shrilly, and the two men stopped.

One, a rather small lean youth in shabby finery, blue-eyed and ruddy-skinned, was doubtless a foreigner. An Englishman, judged the sentinel who had heard him speak to his companion in strongly accented Spanish; and —by the blessed Trinity!—all of his northern breed were heretics, and most of them, considered the sentinel, were pirates and rogues.

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A GAY CALEDONIAN SWASHBUCKLER FIGHTS HAPPILY TO FREE THE NEW WORLD FROM OLD SPAIN. . . . A NOVEL, BY

Achmed Abdullah



The other man, a squat, copper-brown Chibcha Indian, was in the purple, silver-and-black embroidered household livery of the viceregal household. Still, even in these modern days—the Year of the Lord 1759, and more than two centuries after Pizarro's conquest—there were still fanatical patriots who dreamed of former Inca glory and were not above reddening this same glory with a dagger treacherously plunged into a noble grandee breast.

It paid, reflected the sergeant, to err on the side of safety and leave nothing to chance.

So there was his halberd, quickly swinging in a half circle and blocking the entrance, while he demanded the countersign.

"Christ is King!" the Indian gave it promptly; then he asked: "May we pass?"

"Not so fast! What about,"—a finger pointed,—"your friend? An Englishman, eh?"

The blue-eyed stranger took a step forward.

"My name," he announced, stridently and aggressively, "is M'Gregor: Duncan Tormaid M'Gregor, Laird of Drimdorran, of Barisdale and of Loch-na-Staing."

The Spaniard was amused.

"A yard-long, jawbreaking sort of name," he said. "But what of it?"

"Merely," was the heated rejoinder, "had you as much sense as a beetle, you would know that I am a Scot, and not an Englishman."

"Pah! Scot or English—six of one and half a dozen of the other."

Duncan M'Gregor bit his nether lip.

"I," he said slowly, "am not one to be insulted with impunity."

"Insulted?" The soldier was astonished. "By Our Lady! I had no intention—"

"Listen!"

In a few blunt and blighting words Duncan proceeded to make clear the difference—at least as he reckoned it—between the peoples north and south of the Tweed; and the sergeant smiled apologetically. He himself, he explained, was a rough, illiterate man, and he hoped the señor would forgive his ignorance.

"Still," he went on, "I'm on guard here. I have to know who passes and for what purpose and—"

"His Excellency the Viceroy," interrupted the Indian, "is expecting the Scots hidalgo, having granted him audience." He drew from his girdle a strip of parchment with a seal on a silver cord dangling from it. "Convince yourself."

The other was unable to read. But he made a great show of examining the seal, which bore the arms of Castile and Leon, and found it genuine.

"Go with God!" he said.

They walked through the gate. Serafino the Chibcha led the way toward the viceregal residence. Duncan M'Gregor followed, nose in the air and his thin, pliable French blade—riding at his left hip and sticking up and out at an impudent angle like a wren's tail—no less in the air.

Here and there troopers, Spaniards and mestizos, were lolling about. Big hearty men in leather and steel, they nudged each other and swapped grins and coarse, unflattering comment when they saw this small man—whose haughty demeanor, as if he were striding along to the skirl of bagpipes, seemed to give the lie to his shabby attire.

Duncan glared at them, cursed them under his breath in English and Gaelic. Yet, while angry at them, he was angrier still at the world at large which, he considered, had treated him so scurvily of late. The sad state of his purse showed this. So did the state, quite as sad, of his garments.

TWO weeks earlier, strolling down the quay half an hour after his ship docked, he had asked a passing Indian how to get to the palace. "I desire a word or two," he had said negligently, "with the Viceroy." He had been informed by the other that His Excellency was a grave and disdainful Castilian, most difficult of approach.

Of course, the Indian had added, there were ways and means. . . . For instance, he—Serafino—was one of the Viceroy's most trusted servants; therefore, though it would take a little time, it could be managed—for a small consideration. He had held out a slim greedy hand—with the result that after lengthy and spirited bargaining, shrewd Scot against shrewd Chibcha, the former had parted with his few last *louis d'or*.

Thence the purse, almost empty except for the lonely and melancholic clink of a couple of copper coins.

And as to his seedy outer man:

Serafino had lived up to his promise and arranged the audience for this afternoon. But Duncan had not been willing to present himself at the palace in the rough sailor's garb he had worn abroad the *Etoile de Bretagne*, the barkentine on which he, the proud Highland gentleman, had worked his passage across the Atlantic and round the Horn, in the same (and most malodorous) forecastle with the gutter scum of the Bordeaux waterfront.

So he had put on his one decent suit of clothes. But for three months it had been wrapped in a dirty tarpaulin and stowed under his berth, and now his elegant canary-yellow satin knee-breeches were stained with mildew. His full-skirted, apricot-colored velvet coat (and, ah, how—that evening at the Spanish ambassador's house in Versailles—Dolores had complimented him on its smooth fit!) was threadbare and wrinkled. The foam of Chantilly lace at throat and wrists was brown-spotted. His great periwig was in need of a Parisian coiffeur's expert curling-irons. The scabbard of his sword was rusty. And the three-inch scarlet heels on his shoes were bent out of shape, so much so that occasionally he would stumble and nearly fall; then the lolling troopers would grin and coarsely jest, and he would grow the more incensed.

He swallowed his rage with an effort. Sooner or later, he decided, he would teach these uncouth ruffians a lesson. And he walked on stiffly, his heels clicking on the stones.

Always he had been in the habit of wearing his heels extra-high, as always his sword had been extra-long—because of his Scots vanity which sat upon him almost like a virtue; and, somehow, too, in self-defense.

For his father and his three older brothers—all four had died fighting for Bonnie Prince Charlie and against the English usurper at Culloden where he himself had been gravely wounded—had been lusty giants, well over six feet from head to toe, massive and wide-chested. The "runt" they had called Duncan with jovial, affectionate derision; and since boyhood he had tried to make up for his lack of inches and pounds by various means—some artificial, as his high heels and long sword attested; and some the opposite, as attested by his hard courage. He used his courage as he used his blade: with skill and ferocity. He had proved it at Culloden; had proved it too when, after the collapse of the Stuart cause, he had become a refugee, had crossed the stormy sea on a fishing-smack and joined the French army.

There he had done so well that he (at the time not yet twenty-five) had been made a colonel for valor on the field of battle, leading one of King Louis' Norman regiments to smashing victory against the tall Prussian grenadiers. Thus his future might have been brilliantly assured. He might have ended his life as a Marshal and a Peer of France, full of honors and gout—might have ended it, for that matter, some decades later, beneath the guillotine—had it not been for a girl.

Dolores was her name: Dolores Maria Aurelia, only daughter of the Duke de Córdovez, Spanish ambassador at the court of Versailles.

DUNCAN thought of her now, with joy and sadness, as he followed the Indian; he thought of her with that curious, rather stilted trick of the imagination which was his Highland birthright.

"A girl," he told himself, "with a profile so finely, so exquisitely chiseled—soaring forward as a free bird soars into the wind!" And he told himself: "It is as if you were walking down a long barren dusty road, alone and unhappy. And then you turn a corner—and you meet her!"

Oh, yes, he had met her, though not turning the corner of a dusty road, but on a well-waxed floor, stepping the minuet with her as partner. The *minuet du cœur*, "the minuet of the heart," as it was called so charmingly in French; and indeed he had lost his heart that same night, moving with her through the slow, gracefully stately ritual of the dance.

So lovely she was, he had thought, so amazingly lovely, with her small oval face, reminiscent of the Madonna which Raphael had never painted, not having had a model beautiful enough; her raven-black hair in which pearls and rosebuds mingled their whiteness; her high-waisted, low-cut gown of pale violet brocade, shot with dull silver and elfin green, the wide circular skirt ruffled and looped into semblance of some fantastic plumage; her tiny narrow feet in their silver slippers, like the carved work of a Venetian jeweler's art.

He had stared at those tiny narrow feet, and she had laughed.

"Monsieur," she had said, "you are out of step."

"Because the drums disturb me."

"Drums? There are only the violins and flutes."

"Drums, Mademoiselle, which throb in my heart when I look at you."

She had blushed. The minuet had continued, a tune by Bellinzoni, in a minor key. Dolorous it was, yet with a phantasm of gayety twining through it; honeyed, yet with a queer, sad, bitter aftertaste.

He would never forget the melody; he heard it now, in his memory, as he followed the Indian.

There had been former years, before he had met Dolores, when romance had meant to him no more than a light and frivolous and flighty thing; no more than the longing to escape for the span of a few hours from drab reality and to seek for a delicately scented, brightly colored nothing-in-particular. It had meant eagerness to sip whatever was likely to be sugary or spiced; to kiss, in the half-light, a face that was soft; to feel the passion of the moment, and to awaken the next morning to real life—a man's striving and worthwhile life.



"Halt!" the sergeant's voice peaked shrilly.

But that night during the minuet, he had made the amazing discovery that romance was the decency of life, the protest against whatever was ugly and sordid and unclean; that it was the everlasting truth of life, the seriousness of life, more serious than death.

He had fallen in love with her, and she with him; madly, tragically, in love.

For there had been another man to whom her widowed father had promised her hand. A marriage of convenience it would be, of state and high politics; he being the Prince Bertrand de Cazenave-Cavalli—related, again and again, to royalty: cousin to the King of France, second cousin to the King of Spain, third cousin to the Emperor of Austria.

A most high-and-mighty personage, indeed; though Duncan had not cared a snap of his fingers. Why—let the other be nephew to the Pope's Holiness and brother-in-law to the Tsar of Muscovy! What of it? He himself was a M'Gregor. The trees were not more old than was his clan, nor yet the mountains, nor yet the seas.

He would win her!

So, with the help of Dolores' old nurse, Doña Manuela Panfilo, there had been stolen moments, kisses, and oaths exchanged of eternal love.

Dolores had been so very young, not yet seventeen; she had used her youth as an excuse to plead with her father, begging him to put off her marriage to the Prince for a year or two. And in a year or two (had been her and Duncan's bright hope) much could happen.

But one day Cazenave-Cavalli had happened upon one of their secret rendezvous. There had been a scene. Insults passed; and a duel ensued on the following morning, in the forest of Fontainebleau—one suddenly interrupted by a platoon of fusileers, with their commanding officer walking up to Duncan and crying:

"How dare you draw sword against the King's kin? To your quarters, sir! You're under arrest."

Half an hour later a friend—a soldier of France and a Scots refugee like himself—had come to Duncan and said:

"Of course the thing was cooked up as neatly as a rabbit stew."

"You think the Prince is a poltroon?"

"I know he is. And listen—you must flee! Or you'll rot in the Bastille."

"Flee? The coward's way, M'Kenzie!"

"No more the coward's way than when, after bloody Culloden, you and I and so many other Highland chiefs took ship to France."

"But Dolores—"

"Can you kiss her, can your arms be about her, when you're chained to a slimy prison wall? Some day, if you'll go away now, you'll fight again—and love again."

Finally Duncan had seen the wisdom of the other's advice. Yes, some day he'd fight again, love again; he'd come back to her and claim her.

He had scribbled a hurried note: *"Wait for me, best beloved!"*

He had asked M'Kenzie to give it to Dolores; and within the hour, he had left Paris. He had ridden hard, had reached the Bordeaux waterfront, and the smelly forecastle of the *Etoile de Bretagne,* only a few jumps ahead of the French secret agents and—

He interrupted his reflections.

This chapter of his life was over and done with. Here he was now, in the New World, the alien, exotic American world, ready to offer his services to Don Gil Rodriguez y Maldonado, Duke of Valdivia and Viceroy of Peru. . . .

The Indian stopped in front of a small building, halfway to the palace.

"The canteen," he explained. "Wait here, while I talk to His Excellency."

He went on his way, and Duncan pushed open the door.

At the farther wall, he saw a great fireplace where two Indians, naked to the waist, were busy turning a quarter



"I wish to offer you my services as a soldier," said Duncan. "Refused—without thanks." The Duke waved a hand toward the door.

of mutton on a roasting-spit. On benches about candlelit tables was a picaresque riffraff of humanity—some smoking, others noisily eating and drinking. Most of them were Spaniards. But there were also a few Portuguese, Italians and Negroes and mestizos—soldiers, stable-crimps, kitchen-boys and palace servants and hangers-on. Too, a sprinkling of women, engaged in no profession except a very ancient one already mentioned in the Bible.

There was an odor of roast meat and onions and alcohol and tobacco; a mingling of shifting fire-smoke and livid candle-wraith; a steam of unwashed humans; all floating up companionably enough toward the low, sooty, black-beamed ceiling. A rich, motley tapestry of faces—faces crafty and stupid, scarred and bearded, grotesque and handsome, keen and villainous, straight and crooked—faces to delight a painter's heart. And most arresting was that of a man who stood there, immensely tall, thin as a lath, with feet straddled wide apart, hands gesticulating, entertaining the company with a tale ribald and salty, to judge from the raucous mirth.

His nose was an eagle's beak; his lips were broad. His golden-yellow hair was short-cropped in the Flemish manner, and Flemish too were his mustaches, fiercely turned up at the corners and tickling his ears. He was dressed in scarlet, and the sword at his side was longer even than Duncan's.

The latter, crossing the threshold, bumped against a three-legged stool, sent it crashing to the ground; and the scarlet-clad one turned.

"Quiet!" he admonished. "Are you not aware that you are rudely interrupting a gentleman?"

Duncan blushed and hated himself for blushing.

He was in his own way shy and oversensitive, being so conscious of his short stature. On the other hand, he was in the habit of counteracting his shyness by his sarcastic tongue and his reckless bravery.

"Tell me," he inquired, "did I hear aright? You spoke of a gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Meaning, I suppose,"—slowly and shiftingly,—"yourself?"

"Whom else, pray?"

"Strange what mistaken notions some men have of themselves!" Duncan smiled thinly; and people tittered, while the Fleming roared:

"What confounded, incredible arrogance!"

"Can truth ever be arrogance?"

More titters; then the Fleming demanded in a bullying trumpet of a voice:

"Who are you, impudent rascal, to bandy words with me? What are you?"

"As to *what* I am," was the cold measured reply. "I am what you claim to be: a gentleman. And as to *who* I am—Duncan Tormaid M'Greg-

or is my name. And look"—bringing his sword to the fore with a swing of his hip—"this is my twin brother, and he not meek!"

The other's rage changed to amusement.

Why, he thought, here was a brave little man, a tough little cockerel, fearless and impudent and of unstaunched speech! He grinned.

"Are you not afraid," he demanded, "lest your twin brother, being so long, might get between your legs and trip you?"

Again Duncan's anger rose flush with his shyness, flush with his violence.

"The last man who annoyed me," he announced threateningly, fist on hilt, "is done with and dead. And what have you to say to that?"

"That you do not lack boldness."

"Nor does my steel lack boldness—nor strength, nor cunning skill."

The Fleming laughed loudly. Such a tough little cockerel! A man after his own heart! He liked him: he tapped him on the shoulder.

"You're a mighty small man," he declared, "for so much bragging."

"Better too small than too tall. At least I am able to find myself. But you—a thin weedy ribbon of a man,"—Duncan looked him up and down—"how do you find out now where your feet are?"

Suddenly, deliberately, he trod on the Fleming's toes, and the latter yelled in pain, jumped back.

"Don't do that," he warned, "or the red anger will come upon me."

"I am ready for anger, red or black. And,"—loosening sword in scabbard,—"my twin brother is ready for play."

The people in the canteen exchanged glances. They did not believe their ears. Nor did the Fleming.

"Do you know," he demanded frowning, "to whom you are talking?"

"Well?"

"I,"—drawing himself up to his full height,—"am Dirk Cornelius van Buskirk, chief guard and protector—such is my honorable title—to the Viceroy's noble person, and the best swordsman in Peru."

"Maybe the second-best—as you will admit if you should still be alive at the end of fifteen minutes." Duncan paused. "You wear a sword, I notice. For ornament?"

"Eh?"—furiously. "What's that?"

"Out with it, if it is not for ornament! Or are you perhaps afraid?"

"Afraid? *I*—of *you*, wart?"

"Don't keep me waiting too long. Or I'll believe that you are."

DUNCAN'S steel flashed free; so, an instant later, did Dirk van Buskirk's. But his rage had faded; he shook his head. He did not wish to injure this little man; he felt somehow ashamed of crossing swords with him.

Still, what was he to do?

He sent his sword swishing through the air. And then a woman rushed forward. She was handsome in a ripe, full-blown way, and poured, apparently, into a gown of emerald-green satin that brought out every curve of her opulent figure and clashed strikingly with her bright-red hair.

"You cannot do it, Dirk!" she exclaimed. "It would be murder. What chance has the little man?"

"No chance at all, Esmeralda. Nor shall I hurt him very much. A twist of my wrist, and he'll be disarmed, and then I shall put him across my knees and tan his small posterior to teach him better manners."

Once more his sword went swishing.

"Come on, cockerel," he cried, "and come fighting!"

A space was cleared. The people laughed, chattered. Here was sport! Tough little man against tough big man! And the end was inevitable.

Blades clanked in the grand salute, engaging in *quarte*, foible to foible, while a large black-bearded Portuguese assumed the office of master of ceremonies.

"On guard!" he exclaimed.

So they were at it: "An elephant," commented one woman, "against a flea."

"Plucky little flea," laughed another, "soon to be crushed!"

Right feet slithered forward. Arm muscles flexed. Weapons leaped, sparkling from point to pommel like diamond pins—and after a while, the Fleming's frown began to deepen.

For his opponent, in spite of his lack of inches, was a fencer of parts. He was—by the Lord!—the finest sworder the big man had ever encountered—feinting and lunging with most amazing suppleness and shrewdness and strength, forcing Dirk back, back, back, almost causing him to lower his point. . . . The onlookers murmured: What was this? What was happening? Could it be possible?

"No, no!"

"Yes, yes! Look at the flea!"

"And look at the elephant!"

A pause; then, once more:

"On guard!"

The blades rattled like stones on a coffin. Thrust and counterthrust!

And still Dirk receding steadily. Still, as steadily, remorselessly, Duncan advancing; then, all at once, his sword switching from right to left. Then another feint; a staccato riposte —*one-two, one-two*—and the Fleming's weapon jerked out of his grip, flying from his fist like a shooting-star, describing a glittering, fantastic curve high above the heads of the onlookers and diving point-foremost into a corner of the room.

Silence fell.

The people looked at each other. The impossible had happened! They stared at Duncan with admiration and something akin to awe.

He was wiping his blade, which had slightly pinked the other in the armpit.

"I grant you life," he said in a lordly manner.

"Nor am I fool enough to refuse the gift, little man. Thanks! And that trick of yours, switching blades from right to left—will you teach it to me?"

"Gladly. And, after I have taught you, you shall be"—Duncan smiled—"the second-best swordsman in Peru."

"High honor indeed, with you the first! Shall we drink on it?"

Glasses and bottles were brought. They sat down; the red-haired woman joined them, leaned over and kissed Duncan—and Dirk growled, nor altogether in jest:

"None of that, Esmeralda! Or it will be a fight all over again—and this time to the death. *My* death. I'm afraid."

Duncan laughed.

"What is mere woman," he demanded, while Esmeralda's green eyes flashed angrily, "when brave man meets brave man?" He raised his glass. "Hail, big comrade!"

"Hail, little comrade!"

They drank; and presently the Scot, being a Scot, remarked:

"Your sword, by the rules of the game, is now mine."

"A small price to pay for my life—which is dear and sweet to me. Help yourself!"

SO, not many minutes later, when the Indian had returned with word that His Excellency was awaiting Duncan, and when the latter followed him to the palace, he had two long swords, instead of merely one, riding on his hip.

They reached the viceregal residence. They passed through a procession of rooms, all furnished in chilly, formal Spanish grandeur, paneled in brocades and Cordovan leather and tapestries within gilt frames carved into the escutcheons of the families of Rodriguez and Maldonado, Dukes of Valdivia; and everywhere soldiers and armed servants halted them, time and again, demanding the password and a look at the parchment with the Viceroy's seal.

"His Excellency," remarked Duncan, "seems to be as coy as an oyster in its shell."

"Sh-sh!" whispered Serafino, and he stopped at a narrow door covered with thin ornate plates of Inca gold, and knocked at it seven times. It was like a signal.

"Come in!" a sharp voice called.

Serafino opened the door. They entered; it took Duncan a few seconds before his eyes became accustomed to the gloom inside; then he saw a very small room, with a window, iron-grilled and heavily draped, high on one of the walls, and sitting in a chair, a man with his hands stretched out over a glowing charcoal brazier.

The Indian bowed.

"Your Excellency," he began, "may I be permitted to present—"

"I know, I know!" the sharp voice interrupted. "You were well bribed. Now you have done your well-bribed duty, so—"

"Oh,"—protestingly,—"Your Excellency!"

"I know your greed, my Serafino, and I like you none the less. Let's have a little light, that I may see the fool who paid you."

Serafino lit a bronze lamp; and an instant later, Duncan got a clear view of the Viceroy—a man most astonishingly lean and angular: The nose, the ears, the uptilted chin that rose defiantly to meet the sardonic lower lip, the eyebrows, the thin long mouth, even the very feet in their fur-lined slippers—everything was in sharp angles. Sharply angular too were the words which he shot at Duncan:

"Why did you come here? What do you want?"

"I wish to offer you my services as a soldier."

"Refused—without thanks."

"But—"

"I am Viceroy of His Most Catholic Majesty, the King of Spain and of the Americas. It is not my custom to employ heretics in the army." He waved a hand toward the door. "The audience is ended. . . . And," he added with a harsh laugh, "I'm afraid the bribe you gave Serafino was money wasted."

Here was something which outraged Duncan's Scots sense of economy; it outraged, too, his religious principles.

"Your Excellency," he said, "I met a Fleming, Dirk van Buskirk, in your service. And he is, doubtless, what you,"—flaring up a little,—"call a heretic; though I, being of strictly Protestant persuasion and upbringing—"

"Please—please, I beg of you"—a wintry smile curled the Duke's lips—"let us not talk theology! I'm no Torquemada and you, I trust, are no John Knox. Anyway, the Fleming is not a soldier of Spain. He is"—and he seemed secretly amused—"in my private, my very private employ."

"Let me too be in your private employ."

"I do not need you. There are plenty now to do my bidding. The *compañeros del Virey*—the Viceroy's companions—they are called. They are—ah—my guards and protectors. And, by the Saviour's seven wounds, they earn their pay! They are gentlemen,"—with that same secret amusement,—"dressed in scarlet, though at times, the better to cloak their comings and goings, garbed in black. The pick of the swordsmen—and Van Buskirk the best of them all."

"The best no longer," was Duncan's rejoinder.

"Pah! He has slain his dozens and defeated his hundreds."

"But *I*,"—slowly,—"defeated *him*."

The Duke jumped up.

"What are you telling me?"

"The truth."

"If you can prove it—"

"I have a number of witnesses; nor will the Fleming himself deny it."

"But—how?"

"A simple matter. He annoyed me, and I challenged him. He accepted the challenge—and I disarmed him. And in token of it,"—tossing Dirk van Buskirk's weapon clattering at the other's feet,—"here: I brought his sword along of mine own which did the business."

SO it came about that Duncan M'Gregor was appointed captain of the *compañeros del Virey*—so-called officially, although there were certain people who referred to them as the Viceroy's spies and hired assassins. The Fleming, now second-in-command (nor jealous because of the demotion), made their duties plain to Duncan—very plain.

"We are, you might say, the Duke's counter-poison, stewed and brewed by an expert apothecary. We bribe, more generously than others bribe. We intrigue, more cleverly than others intrigue. And at times we kill, more swiftly than others kill." He paused; he smiled.

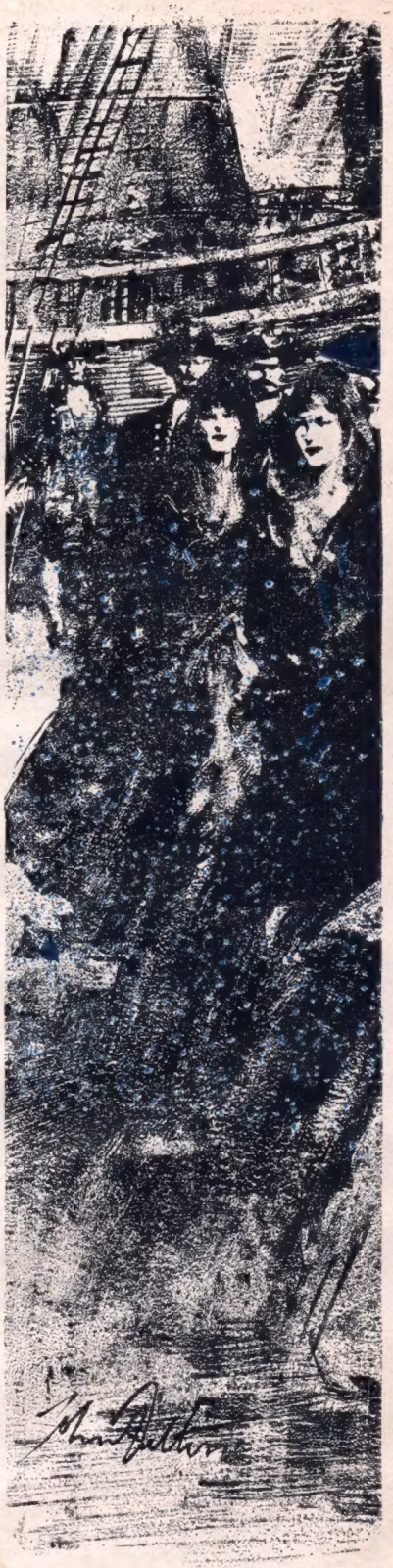
"Here we are," he went on, "you and I and seven sturdy, crafty rogues to do your bidding. Servants to the Viceroy of Peru. Yet, in truth, it is we who are the real Viceroy, comrade!"

"We," Duncan echoed in his mind, *"who are the real Viceroy."* And he himself the leader!

The notion tickled his Scots vanity. Yet there was, also, his Scots common sense which made him wonder if he was equal to it. And there was, finally, his rigid Scots code and point of honor that caused him certain qualms. For after all, the task was a bit on the shady, slippery, unknightly side, unworthy of a Highland gentleman.

Oh, yes, a leader—but a leader of spies and bravos!

Well—once more appealing to his dour common sense—refugees, like beggars, had not the right to be choosers. He would have to make his way the best way he could; he would have to regain his fortunes somehow. Later



Duncan saw her—



Dolores, the girl he loved! And the man—Prince de Cazenave-Cavalli. . . . Husband and wife.



Juanita found Duncan a worthy adversary. Above the edge of her fan she whispered, "You are so gallant!"

on, their origins would be forgotten, as indeed, he considered with native, pawky humor, they had been forgotten centuries ago—since once upon a time, before they had become haughty clan chiefs, the M'Gregors themselves had been raiders and cattle-thieves, bloody-handed and unashamed.

So he mused, there in the Fleming's quarters, sitting across from his friend, with a bottle of nut-brown sherry between them, as Dirk went on:

"Your duties, incidentally, begin at once."

"Oh?"

"No later than tomorrow morning. A ship has been sighted—a fast corvette from Spain. A mighty Prince is aboard, a man whom old Rags-and-Bones," (such was the nickname irreverently bestowed upon the Duke of Valdivia), "gravely suspects of having been sent here to act as a disturbing maggot in the viceregal cheese."

"You mean—"

"To investigate here and there, and make a confidential and doubtless unflattering report about His Excellency's endeavors."

"Is there cause and reason?"

"The Viceroy is doing his best. Still, isn't there always cause and reason—Peruvian gold being Peruvian gold and mortal flesh being weak?"

"And what am I supposed to do?"

"You'll counter-investigate, make a counter-report—for the Viceroy's eyes. And let it be full of meat, poisoned meat to interfere with the Prince's digestion."

"I doubt that I am shrewd enough."

"You'll have me to help, and the seven *compañeros*, old hands at the game. Not to mention Serafino, a wily little man who can hear fleas cough. Although, if I may suggest, there is a more practical and direct



method, which in the end will save you time and effort."

"Namely?"

"An accident to the Prince." Dirk drew two fingers and a thumb across his brawny throat and made an unpleasant, squealing sound, like a pig dying under the butcher's knife. "A fatal accident."

"Murder?" Duncan asked bluntly.

"What a bluff blunderbuss of a man you are! Have you no delicacy? I spoke of an accident."

"Why lie to me?"

The Fleming sighed.

"Very well, I'll *not* lie. . . . Murder, if you prefer. Do I shock you?"

"Deeply."

"*Tch-tch-tch*—such a tender conscience! I honor you for it, though I personally am not blessed—or cursed—with the like. Why, when I think back on the men to whose demise I have attended—ah,"—hypocritically—"may God have mercy on their souls! There was, for instance, one last week—a big, upstanding, red-haired Catalan—"

"I," curtly, "am not interested."

The other laughed. He filled his glass and drank.

"Hail, comrade!" he cried. "Hail, scrupulous cavalier! You'll discover that here in Peru scruples, like iron, rust quickly."

"Listen!"—angrily.

"I know, I know! Not in your case, eh? You're the shining exception. Well, let me tell you that I too was once a blushing, dainty lad, as full of high, noble principles as a Dutch bun is of raisins, as succulent and delicate as a young peach with its bloom on. And look at me now: A seamed old warrior, tough with various sins and iniquities and thoroughly enjoying the same. Ah,"—again he laughed and hiccuped loudly—"you'll learn presently, my pranking boy!"

That evening, Duncan consulted with Serafino. He liked the latter and somehow, in spite of the man's greed, trusted him and had an idea that the liking was mutual.

The Chibcha was a highly educated man, brought up by Dominican friars. He smiled when the Scot told him what Dirk had suggested.

"Like a coarse clash and crash of Flemish brasses," he described Dirk, "among the fine, thin precision of Spanish guitars. I do not agree with him; I disapprove of killing, except as the last resort. There are more honorable means—for shrewd people."

"I doubt," said Duncan, as he had told Dirk, "that I am shrewd enough."

"Aren't you? I was present at your audience with His Excellency, remember! You said, and did, the right thing at the right time. That's all there is to shrewdness."

"You flatter me. Still, if you could be more explicit with your advice—"

"Very well. Besides doing and saying the right thing, you must also listen to the right thing. . . . Listen, I mean, among the Prince's retinue. Make friends, chiefly with the women. There'll be maids and ladies-in-waiting—and you'll have no trouble, for you're young, good-looking, of gallant bearing. And some of the little *señoritas,* I understand, are inclined to be susceptible—"

"You spoke," Duncan cut in, "of more honorable means. Perhaps the means you propose are even *less* honorable than murder."

The Indian looked at the Scot, with a smile that was queerly sad.

"We have," he said slowly, "a proverb in the Chibcha language. Consider well its wisdom." He quoted it: "'When you are in an alien land, you must conceal your traveling, your treasure—and your tenets.'"

EARLY on the following morning Duncan, accompanied by Dirk van Buskirk, went down to the waterfront to meet the corvette—the *Aragon* it was called—which had made the run from Corunna in record time. It loomed up on the horizon and backed swiftly into its berth, its cordage clacking and rattling, its enormous sails stretched wide like a hawk's wings and then suddenly folding tightly, almost demurely, while from the topgallant mast, brilliantly gilded for the occasion, the flag of Spain whipped in the puffy shore breeze.

The Viceroy was not there to do the honors. He sent word by his *adelantado* or Captain-General, the Marquis Macario Sebastian de la Fuente, that most regretfully a bad attack of fever was keeping him indoors—which was a lie meant to put the newcomer at a social, and therefore diplomatic, disadvantage, since now it would be the Prince's duty to pay a call on His Excellency, instead of the other way around.

But there were many others besides the *adelantado,* who, invited or uninvited, crowded the dock.

After all, the arrival of a royal corvette bringing the King's emissary was a gala event. So there were here Spaniards and *criollos,* Indians and mestizos of a dozen hues; venders of guava jelly and tropical fruits, of crude pottery and straw mats and woven baskets, hastily spreading their wares on the dusty ground; lemonade-sellers clanking their brass cups; men with monkeys for sale, and one with a tame jaguar on a chain; scribes and clerks and apprentices, soldiers and porters and roustabouts and beggars.



Duncan stood at the door, speeding (or perhaps not speeding) Juanita, with a kiss on her pouting red lips.

Small children bobbed up and down excitedly between the legs of the grown-ups. Wealthy merchants in snowy cotton clothes, their heads crowned by wide-brimmed floppy *jipa-japa* hats, and municipal functionaries buckram-stiff with hidalgo dignity jostled prosperous bankers—and if, as was the case with some, Spanish names ill disguised telltale Jewish noses or Moorish eyes, this little matter was overlooked, here in the tolerant colonies.

Butcher and baker and candlestick-maker were there, Tom, Dick and Harry—or let us say, José, Juan and Jorge—all of that picturesque Lima world and its womenfolk as well. It was a vivid cross-section of the flotsam and jetsam of Old Spain which had surged to the shores of New Spain in the wake of the *conquistadores*—some eager for gold and some for adventure and some to carry the message and the cross of Christ—and had mated and bred there with Latin recklessness; a tree and turbulent mingling of white and brown, of supercilious knight and gentle priest, of swashbuckling buccaneer and tarred mariner, of prudish *doncella* and staid, well-corseted matron or of loud-mouthed slattern.

There was laughing and yelling and cursing and pressing forward as the *Aragon* was roped fast to the pier, then a splashing sideways like a puddle beneath a booted foot, as a lackey in the Duke of Valdivia's household livery swung a long brass-tipped stave left and right and shouted insolently:

"Give way, nobles and commoners! Give way for the Viceroy's *caballeros!*"

On the heels of the *adelantado,* they stepped forward with measured, pompous tread—sallow, lean Castilian gentlemen, in sober black and of the

utmost punctilio. They raised old-fashioned, plumed bonnets or modern, gold-laced tricornes as, after a time, the gangplank was lowered and down it came other sallow, lean Castilian gentlemen, also in sober black and with the same punctilio.

The latter,—rather nervously and awkwardly, the gangplank being narrow and steep,—were walking backward and bowing at every step, in conformity with the ancient Spanish court etiquette, since they preceded the Prince who represented the King's Majesty and who came slowly, solemnly; by his side was a girl in sequin-shimmering white, a traveling-cloak of crimson velvet across her shoulders.

DUNCAN saw her and gasped. A girl, he thought, with a profile so finely, so exquisitely chiseled—soaring forward as a free bird soars into the wind! Dolores, the girl he loved!

And the man—obese, pale, snub-nosed—the last time Duncan had seen him had been a few months earlier, in the forest of Fontainebleau, during the interrupted duel.

Prince Bertrand de Cazenave-Cavalli—and Dolores. . . . Husband and wife. *Husband and wife—*

Duncan gave a choked exclamation in the Gaelic: *"Dhia gleidh sinn!"*

Dirk glanced at him.

"What's the matter, comrade?" he asked.

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

Oh, no, he reflected, nothing was the matter! Nothing at all, except a pain in his heart like the twisting of a dull knife, at the faithlessness of woman!

Dolores—who had sworn eternal love. . . . And the note he had sent: *"Wait for me, best beloved!"*

She had not waited, not even as much as a few short months. Just as soon as his back had been turned, she had— Abruptly he checked his bitter thoughts.

No, no, no, he told himself, it was not her fault! He was certain of it.

Perhaps M'Kenzie had not been able to give her the note; perhaps it had been intercepted; and the Lord knew what lies she had been told about him.

Too, the pressure that must surely have been brought to bear on her. A marriage of state and high politics, wasn't it? They must have forced her into it—and she had been alone, with nobody to turn to except her old nurse Doña Manuela Panfilo, as helpless as herself.

No, no, not her fault! He loved her as he had loved her from the first, as he would love her to the end.

But the Prince—

With hate in his eyes, hate searing his soul, he stared at the latter who was bowing to the Marquis de la Fuente and introducing his wife:

"Señor Adelantado, may I have the gracious privilege of presenting you to—"

And then, all at once, an idea occurred to Duncan.

Here was Cazenave-Cavalli, the Viceroy's enemy—and his own. It was a most auspicious coincidence: He would do his duty by his employer, and at the same time—

He laughed; again Dirk asked:

"What's the matter?"

"Something that proves how wise you are."

"Oh?"

"You see, I have found out already how, here in Peru, scruples, like iron, rust quickly."

The Fleming smiled wolfishly. His flat, spatulate thumb indicated the King's emissary.

"A fatal accident?" he inquired. "You will rob him of his life?"

"I shall rob him of more than mere life!"

He was silent as down the gangplank, directing a number of servants who carried the baggage, there tripped a tiny, shriveled old woman.

Doña Manuela Panfilo—Duncan would have known her, even had he not seen her, by her sharply abusive language as she bullied and hectored the servants and the porters and roustabouts who swarmed around her, offering their services.

"Away with you!" she shrieked, as a large swarthy man picked up a leather-covered trunk. "Back in Madrid they warned me against your like! Ah,"—with a Spaniard's contempt for colonials,—"thieving, rascally *criollos!"*

"I," was the indignant retort, "am as honest as any Castilian—"

"Honest—*you?* A crook—I can tell by the tilt of your ugly nose, the quirk in your shifty eyes! Let go that trunk! I would no more trust you with it than I would trust a bone to a mangy dog!"

And to one of Dolores' maids who had dropped a small box:

"By Our Lady, Juanita! Would you break my sweet mistress' precious Italian perfume vials, O granddaughter of seventeen vile, misbegotten rascals?"

Her hard little hand slapped Juanita's face. The girl wept loudly; yet still louder were Manuela's accents as she attended to another maid who was complaining that the toilet-case slung across her back was too heavy.

"Lazy Andalusian wretch!" she yelled. "One more peep out of you and—"

All at once she fell silent, as she happened to see Duncan who stood there, smiling reminiscently, remembering her vituperative tongue of old. Her mouth fell open, disclosing stumpy teeth. She was about to run up to him when, swiftly, warningly, he put two fingers to his lips.

She caught the message and winked at him—and the Fleming noticed it.

"You choose them hoary and withered, don't you?" he mocked.

"Age, too, has its uses," replied Duncan; and he recalled how Manuela had always liked him and how loyally, back in Paris and Versailles, she had been the go-between for Dolores and him.

Then a plan came to him.

He would ask her once more to act as his go-between—for tonight.

Why wait?

Tonight, he thought, was as good a time as any to begin his intrigues for the Viceroy against the Prince de Cazenave-Cavalli, and to find out a little about the latter's schemes. . . . To find out too about Dolores. Was she happy, he wondered, or unhappy?

How, he reflected a moment later, *could* she be happy, married to the Prince? She loathed the man, so she had told Duncan frequently—loathed his pale pasty face, his pedantic brain dwelling at yawning lengths on the husk and never on the kernel of life, his stilted and ludicrous sense of self-importance, his mincing manners that cloaked but ill a streak of sadistic cruelty.

Of course she was unhappy; almost, Duncan hoped that she was—he, who loved her so!

BUT some day he would make it up to her: He would love her the more because of her unhappiness; would give her all his affection, his tenderness, his passion, forever and a day. But—she was another man's wife. And what did it say in the Bible?

"Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

Well—and maybe there was something of the canny Presbyterian in his theological reasoning—it was not God who had joined these two, but the Devil, in the guise of state and high politics. And sooner or later he, Duncan M'Gregor, a God-fearing Scot, would undo the Devil's evil work, would sever the unholy bonds—

He cut short his thoughts.

"Wait!" he said to the Fleming; and a second later, to the other's amazement, he walked up to Manuela and bowed deeply.

"Señora," he began, "if I may be permitted to be of service to you—"

"More likely," was her low-voiced, ironic reply, *"I—*to *you."*

They talked in whispers for a while. Then Duncan returned to Dirk who grinned and demanded:

"You have succeeded? A little assignation with your withered light-o'-love?"

"An assignation? Yes. But not merely for myself." He led his friend away from the dock. "There will be a great carousal tonight. With the old woman's help, some of the princely couple's maids will be our guests, and a number of the male servants. We will welcome them to Peru, with music and laughter and dancing, and plenty of wine to moisten their tongues—"

"And doubtless to loosen them?"

"How well you and I understand each other! Let's explain to the *compañeros del Virey*—whom, by the way, I have not yet met."

"Why not meet them now? They're eager to know you."

On their way back to the palace, they stopped here and there, saying always, haughtily: "Have the bill sent to the Viceroy!"—at a coiffeur's where Duncan had his periwig curled and powdered; at an armorer's to have the rust taken off his scabbard and a keen edge given to his blade; and at a *merceria* where he purchased clothes elegantly suitable for tonight's festivities: an apple-green velvet coat with a high stiff black satin collar about a cravat of snowy-white lace, knee-breeches in a lighter shade of green, silk hose, a tricorne with a plume to it, and patent-leather shoes.

"Put other heels on them," Duncan instructed the shopkeeper. "Red heels, three inches in height."

"*Three?*"

"Three and a half."

"But—"

"You heard me! And have everything delivered this afternoon."

They reached the palace grounds, where the *compañeros* had snug quarters in a fair-sized stone house.

HERE they greeted their new commander—seven of them, dressed in scarlet. Every one of the seven was a rogue; six of them, being heretics, should have been cursed by book and candle, while one should have been burned at the stake, he being a Moslem and therefore altogether a heathenish unbeliever.

Four of them—Ole Olsen, Jarl Olsen, Nels Olsen and Hjalmar Olsen—were Norwegians; brothers they were, yellow-haired and blue-eyed, crooked-mouthed and crooked-brained, brawny to the ankles, braggart in their speech, blood staining their hands and souls, yet brave after the reckless manner of their Norse breed.

The fifth, Hassan Mehmet, nicknamed *El Barril*, or "the Hogshead," because of his enormous girth, was a Moor from Tangiers of whom the telling went that once, attacked in the high Andes by two jaguars, he had slain both brutes with no other weapons than his slim dagger and his bare fists.

The sixth, Baron Heinrich von Warteleben, had been in his youth a fine silken gentleman at the court of the King of Saxony—whence he had been driven forth for reasons too shameful to mention with words, and was still the man to show a handsome leg in the stepping of a dance, to quote bits of Latin verse, to ingratiate himself with the women and, by the same token, to help himself to their jewels between kisses.

And the seventh—addressed by his Christian name of Ivan, his other names being unpronounceable—was a Russian from the Siberian steppes who wore earrings like a woman and a mustache like a tomcat; he could croon a song in his barbarous native language to make you laugh or weep, just as he wished—and could split a stout tree, or a stout head, with a tossed ax from a distance of fifty feet.

Thus, truthfully, Dirk described them, one by one, to Duncan.

"They will cut anybody's throat," he added, "for the sake of a silver peso—and a good many throats, I venture to say, for the mere sport of it."

The Scot was amused.

"How then," he inquired, "will I be able to trust them?"

"By making us fear you a little," said Baron von Warteleben, "and love you a great deal."

"It would be better," sneered one of the Norwegians, "the other way around."

"Although," remarked Hassan Mehmet the Moor, "having heard tell of your grand prowess with point and edge, we—by the teeth of the True Prophet!—fear you already."

He salaamed deeply, in the Moroccan style.

"*Salud, Capitan!*" he exclaimed.

"Salud!" echoed the others.

And unsheathing their blades and extending them in sign of fealty, they acknowledged Duncan's captaincy. As he stood there—so young, so short and slight amid these middle-aged, tall burly ruffians—and calmly took command, he considered that fate, not altogether unaided by his courage, was opening a new career for him; only an ungenerous man would have blamed him for the warm glow which the thought lent to his blood.

"I hope," he said, "that there will never be cause for you to fear me more than you do at this moment. While as to love"—he smiled—"perhaps your hearts will go out to me a little by the time the day is over. For it is I who tonight will give you your fill of good wine, of gay merriment, of red lips and black hair—"

"Some of the wenches are fair-haired," interrupted the Fleming, "unless my vision lied to me as I watched them tripping down the gangplank. And there was one, I noticed particularly, with tresses the color of flame." He stared threateningly at Baron von Warteleben. "Let not your eyes," he warned him, "nor your kisses, stray in her direction, sly Saxon!"

He turned to the others.

"Put on your best clothes," he went on, "and your best manners, scoundrels! Do not smear too much sweet-smelling scent on your tough hides—and wash well your necks—"

"Not to forget your ears," laughed the Scot, "since much shrewd listening is to be done before the sun rises on tomorrow's morning."

THAT evening, in the palace grounds, there was much of jealous, ill-natured grumbling—for why, by Santa Rosa of Lima, should these cursed, unhallowed heretics have all the fun? And what sort of people (black shame on them!) were the Prince's servants that they, supposed to be decent Catholics, should take part in the shocking festivities?—when, through the doors and windows of the *compañeros'* house, drifted a riotous, rollicking symphony of mirth: Shrieks of laughter. Clinking glasses. Rowdy shouts. The scraping of violins, the tinkling of guitars and the twanging of *bandurrias* playing bolero and fandango. The slither and slur of nimble feet stepping the graceful dances of Spain. And presently, as native instruments—tambors and *pincullo* flutes and ten-foot-long wailing bamboo horns—took up the music, the savage national dances of Peru, reminiscent of the days of Inca and Quechua.

The *piura* they danced, with Dirk van Buskirk the enthusiastic teacher and the Spanish guests enthusiastic pupils: undulating and zigzagging gayly across the floor, the women with bodies arched, lifting their skirts high, moving mincingly like turkey hens; the men with bent knees, their coats held out right and left like wings, circling round and round the girls in a series of quick jumps, each ending with a sharp stamp of the heel; Duncan, as eager as the rest, with Juanita as his partner; and the onlookers rhythmically clapping hands, while their voices rose louder and still louder:

"Suaz que te pica el pavo!
Suaz que te mete el pico!
Suaz, por el—espinazo—"

Ah—a *fiesta, caballeros*—a *fiesta, señoritas divinas!*

Glasses were filled, and raised in a toast:

"Long life and happiness to our generous host, the Scots hidalgo!"

More drinking more laughter and dancing; and the seven rogues most congenially occupied. They had discovered discreet corners and charming Spanish girls not quite so discreet.

And between soft kisses and softer promises, they were filtering their artful, crooked way among the princely couple's servants, listening to the gossip of liquor-loosened tongues.

Then the dance ended. Supper was served, and Duncan sat by Juanita's side; she had told him proudly that she was the *moza primera,* or principal lady's-maid in attendance upon the Princess de Cazenave-Cavalli, and here he saw his chance to learn about Dolores.

Juanita was good-looking in a hearty, red-cheeked, roly-poly way. She knew how to use her gold-flecked brown eyes as well as the flick of her fan to full advantage, and she found in Duncan Tormaid M'Gregor a worthy adversary.

For he had not spent all his French years at the front or in rough soldiers' camps. He had flirted and paid court in the gardens of Versailles and the stately homes of Paris; he had, furthermore, the Highland trick of turning a pretty compliment that implied more than it said—and at times said more than it implied.

So when Juanita, above the lacy edge of her fan, remarked that—by the Blessed Virgin!—she was afraid of him, having heard a rumor of his swordsmanship, he replied:

"Is not always Venus the gentle goddess to assuage the fury of Mars?"

This was a polished classical allusion quite lost on a girl whose sole literary achievement consisted in being able to recite the Litany of the Saints. But the expression on Duncan's face sufficiently interpreted the obscure meaning of his words. She gave him a lingering, melting glance; and to bring the subject round to Dolores—indeed all clumsily enough, though Juanita was not aware of it—he continued:

"I saw the Princess this morning. Lovely hair, she has; yet yours is lovelier by far."

JUANITA smiled.

"Oh," she whispered, "you are so gallant!"

"Not I, *señorita!* I am but a coarse hard-bitten man-at-arms. But I have eyes in my head—eyes which tell me that you are more, much more beautiful than your mistress. Ah," he went on, carried away by his own eloquence,—and hoping, the next second, that he was not overdoing it,—"like a soft dream you are, that comes to a man in loneliness and strange places!"

He touched her glass with his.

"To the fairest!" he said softly—while, looking at her, he thought of another. Then he sighed.

"I suppose," he added, "I should envy the Prince de Cazenave-Cavalli."

"Because of his wealth?"

"No, no! Because, in his case, the dream has come true. Because he has the woman whom he loves."

"Has he?" rejoined Juanita.

"Hasn't he?"

A silence. Then she said:

"I'm not the one to talk scandal. Nor, being a modest and virtuous young girl, should I speak of certain things. And yet—"

"And yet?"

"Not once since their marriage has the Prince been permitted to cross the threshold of his bride's apartment—not even on their wedding-day."

"You"—with a start—"you really mean that?"

"I do—and I know. It is Doña Manuela Panfilo who locks the door, night after night, and greets the Prince with rude language befitting neither her station nor his—oh, what a tongue that ancient shrew has!"

She leaned forward. "There is talk," she went on, lowering her voice to a confidential mumble, "of another man whom she loves, a man of most humble degree." Duncan bridled a little. "Talk, too, that they told her this man had died—and that on her wedding-day, she found out it was a lie. Ah, the poor, sweet lamb, I feel so sorry for her!"

Duncan listened. His heart sang.

Dolores loved him still. There was no doubt of it; the locked door, the barred threshold, proved it.

He filled his own and Juanita's glass.

"Let's drink," he cried, "to the future! The grand, golden future!"

He drained his glass; then, with that style of curiously stilted speech which was his in moments of high elation, he said:

"I shall have another try at my kingdom—another fling at the far, far moon. Cold-shouldered by that false jade called Fate, am I? And what of it? I'll make shift of her cold shoulder, till I meet her once more! Then she'll give me a warm shoulder and—by the Lord!—a kiss or two into the bargain! And if she refuses, it'll be my fingers around her throat until she squeals for mercy."

So he spoke—as if to himself—and Juanita frowned.

Whatever—she wondered—could the foreign hidalgo be meaning?

"Señor," she announced, rather severely, "you are intoxicated."

"I am that same—with happiness! Come," as the music started again, "let's dance!"

In our forthcoming September issue Achmed Abdullah and John Fulton will again collaborate to offer you escape from the troubled present to an equally troubled but simpler and more colorful past.

So the fun went on, hour after hour. Outside, the moon and the stars guttered out one by one; the flickering candles vied with richer hues as beyond the windows the young sun shot up on the horizon, racing along the rim of the world in a sea of fire, and morning came, flushing the east with pink and orange and heliotrope.

Morning brought the noises of waking day.

Songbirds gurgled and twittered; somewhere a little furry bat *cheeped* in a minor key; a kitten meowed; a mousing owl rustled in a thatch; honey-bees buzzed to their work among the acacia blossoms; it was a drowsy canticle.

BUT the canticle that came from the *compañeros'* house was not drowsy at all.

For now the party was breaking up; the doors were flung open. Arm in arm, by twos and threes and fours, the revelers rolled across the threshold, reeking of cloying perfume and stale alcohol; with hats rakishly tilted, tunics unbuttoned, gowns spotted with wine and grease, *mantillas* awry atop mussed hair, lace *rebozos* slipping sideways to give glimpses of soft, white shoulders, feet slurring in unsteady rhythm, slightly hiccupy voices praising the Scots hidalgo as the most splendid host in all Peru!

Duncan stood at the door, speeding the parting guests, and speeding (or perhaps not speeding) Juanita, with an arm around her waist and a kiss on her pouting red lips—telling himself, just a little guiltily, that the kiss was but in gratitude for what she had told him about Dolores. Still, let us admit it was a rather lingering gratitude. And then, all at once, he gave a start.

For, from the wing of the palace that housed the princely couple and its retinue, three people came: a little pageboy in black satin, carrying a large prayerbook, Doña Manuela Panfilo, clicking her rosary beads and mumbling *Ave Marias,* and Dolores—all in white; white, too, was the coif wound tightly, demurely, about her small oval face.

They were walking slowly, following the silvery *tinkle-tinkle* of the Angelus bell that came from the chapel on the palace grounds, going to early Mass.

Duncan tore himself away from Juanita, and tried to rush back into the house.

Too late!

Dolores had seen him. Momentarily, she stopped; she turned pale. Then she smiled—it was a curiously thin, curiously impersonal smile—and went imperturbably on her way toward the chapel.

The Ghost of Gillin



NIGHT had caught Eric on the old footpath that led back into the hills from the railroad. On the ridge called Cherokee Spy, he was following the trail along the top of a rimrock and looking down uneasily into the dark valley of Gillin Run.

It was Eric's first visit to the Ozarks since he had gone out of them as a boy of eighteen, eleven years ago. All during his medical schooling and research in Chicago he had wanted to see his hill people again, and Leda; but his personal life had dwindled almost to nothing. Now he was back for a few days at last, on the eve of joining the Marines as a doctor.

As he hurried along, glancing down over the tree-tops at the little Ozark valley, he remembered the morning he had gone across to the railroad by this same trail to enter the world outside, a hill boy with a few dollars in his pocket, and he was proud to be returning as *Dr.* Eric Eveland, of the Fielding Foundation. But he felt he had been buried oblivion-deep in his work and had just waked out of it. He felt he had been shut away like a monk from the living world of men and women for the best years of his young manhood.

Below him the small farms and wastelands of the Run were bathed in dark silver from the gibbous winter moon. The night winds from the hills brought him the ghostly hooting of owls, the dank smell of woods and rocky hollows. It was the sort of eerie night, hinting at banshees and hobgoblins abroad, that he used to roam the hills in, with his father or Leda—watching the cloud scud take on spectral shapes and the long-necked cranes go down the sky like witches riding their broomsticks.

The familiar baying of a coon dog, the gobbling of Hite Purcell's turkeys, the lights of Tobe Tolliver's store and the scattered farms—all this gave him the feeling that this Ozark valley was his home and these Bainters, Tollivers, Judds, Hardwicks were his people. He thought: "If I'd settle here at the end of the war I'd have good practical doctor work to do, like broken bones and babies, and still have time for research— But that all depends on Leda."

The scream of a wildcat over toward Pawpaw Hollow started him thinking about the "ha'nt" which had appeared on Gillin Run, according to his letters from Boone Davis. He could smile at the ha'nt part of it, but he did feel that the Run had had more than its share of trouble in the last few years. Death had visited it strangely often and in odd, violent forms.

Several times he had wondered if there could be something sinister about those "accidents." For the

Run

A young doctor destined for the Marines meets peril first in the Ozarks.

by WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY



sake of his people he intended to look into this, during his visit.

He reached a turn of the cliff where he could see beyond the old apple grove of the Gillin place to Fern Cove, and his eyes lingered on the light of Leda Wallace's cottage there. Then he passed the sentinel beech where he and Leda had said good-by on the morning he left, and their initials in the tree brought memories flooding back pain-sharp. He could see Leda's tight-lipped smile, his wild-rose in her hair, and her eyes begging, "Eric, *don't go!*" while her lips said, "I know you'll be working hard, Eric, so don't worry about getting back for visits."

How long it took people, Eric mused, to see what was worthwhile in their lives. All the old cautious wisdom to the contrary, the first-love between Leda and himself had been priceless. The years drifting by, the letters that got fewer, fewer, till they stopped, and his tyrannical goal of becoming a respected useful person—it had all been a tragic blindness.

He wondered what the hour ahead would bring, between him and Leda.

IN a stance of black oaks he came to a fissure where the trail led down through the rimrock to a woods below. Steep and narrow, the fissure was none too safe at night. But he started down through it confidently. On the trip across the hills that afternoon he'd found he was still a woodsman, from his bush-loping boyhood.

Halfway down the fissure he heard the flip of a laurel bush, up at the cliff top. As he glanced back, a heavy boulder, dislodged from above, came smashing down toward him.

He was squarely in the path of the fearful thing and trapped in the rock cleft. Instinctively he groped for handholds in the sandstone and managed to scramble a few feet up the fissure wall. With a grinding rush the boulder swept past beneath him, careened on to the woods below and crashed in a ravine.

When he got his breath back, Eric remembered the bush flipping, and a suspicion hit him. He listened, heard a bit of gravel trickle down the cliff face, and then he *knew*. Somebody was up yonder. Somebody had pried that boulder loose and launched it at him deliberately.

Bewildered and angry, he groped around for some weapon, found a fist-sized dornick, crept back up to the cliff top, silently, and crouched beside a hollow snag.

As he peered around in the moon-shadows, he tried to puzzle out who his unknown enemy was. Maybe, he thought, some individual had a still near there and was mistaking him for a federal man. Or maybe this was some nondescript of the hills, like a hermit ginseng hunter, whose queer life had twisted his mind.

Somehow he believed neither of these guesses. He believed that the person was somebody living on the Run. Plainly this person had known he was coming, perhaps from his letter to Boone Davis, and had laid the trap specifically for him. It was a cagey job, a death trap planned to look like an accident of the woods.

With a jerk he recalled that those several violent deaths of the past few years had also looked like accidents, and had this identical pattern; he gasped: "Why, hell, they were killings! They were one man's work."

In a little while he picked up the sounds of his enemy getting away from there—too far back in the oaks for him to follow. The man himself went noiselessly, like a wraith of the dark woods, but Eric could tell exactly where he was. By the frightened lisp of a flying squirrel, the *whirr* of a flushed woodcock, the *thup-thup* of a buck rabbit, he kept track of the bush-sneak's escape out along the slope of Cherokee Spy till finally he was gone.

Very thoughtful, Eric got up and went down through the fissure, realizing that he himself had met the ghost of Gillin Run and was on the man's list, for some reason, and that the individual would surely try again to kill him. The shadowiness of the person was a little frightening. He had not met anything exactly like it before. It was as though some primitive brutality, some elemental passion, had taken possession of someone he knew, and was loose on the Run.

AT the trail fork in the valley Eric took the path that led to Fern Cove. He wanted to see Leda, above anyone else, and expected to find her at her cottage.

Past the stone schoolhouse where she taught and the small cemetery where his father slept, he came to the footbridge over an arm of the old Gillin millpond. Noticing a flashlight at the far end, he paused at the step-out in the middle to let the other person go by. A scud of mackerel cloud had dimmed the moon, but he made out that the person was a woman, medium tall, young, with a dog trotting at her heels. While she was still a blurred



Illustrated by Maurice Bower

figure, he recognized her surefootedness on the swaying plank, and with a jolt he saw that his meeting with Leda was upon him.

As he watched Leda come closer, he tried to think up words that would explain the eleven years past. How at first his schooling had left him without a free breath or dollar. How his goal of achieving a worthy life had shouldered other goals aside. How she had stayed with him those eleven years and emerged from that test as the woman he wanted. But all this—the truth from his heart—sounded so hollow that he decided to leave it unsaid.

Leda was heading somewhere up the valley, in spite of the dark tossing night, and he thought how true this was to the pattern of that tomboy girlhood when she had roamed the hills and explored caves as fearlessly as he or Boone. He remembered Boone's casual mention of men she'd gone with during the last several years, and the painful question jigged across his mind: how much had those men meant to her?"

"Lee—"

His voice stopped her dead short. He stepped out and confronted her, searching her face in the dim light for a hint of her feelings toward him. She stood before him slim and straight, her lips parted with the shock of this meeting and the gusts molding her rain-cape to her body, and he realized that he had not built up an idealization of her prettiness, as he had sometimes wondered. That was his first thought as he looked at Leda again in flesh-and-blood—how strikingly pretty and alive and desirable she was.

He said: "Lee! I can't quite believe, all at once, that it's you—actually." He took her hand, and the touch of her was a reassurance. He explained, "I'm going into service, I've got a few days, and I wanted to spend them here, Lee, with you."

She said: "Boone just told me you were coming this evening. You'll find him and Hite and the others down at the store." She drew her hand away and was silent.

IT sounded to Eric as though she was dismissing him. But he refused to believe this. He took the flashlight from Leda's hand and held it so that he could see her better. In her brown eyes he saw that this meeting had upset her. As it had him. He had known that meeting her again would be an unforgettable experience but he had not imagined it would shake him so badly or take the strange form it was taking. As he regarded Leda, she filled him with a new, sudden and overwhelming awareness of womanhood. She was Leda but she was all womankind too. In those few seconds he fully realized how austere and blind his life had been. Blind to women as women. Blind to the quest of them and to the fine wholesome completeness of love and marriage. A forgotten world, a vista that was splendid and quickening, seemed to have suddenly opened up, because of Leda.

He said: "You're going somewhere—let me take you, Lee. It's night and rough weather, and I don't think it's quite the thing to do for you, alone—"

She drew back from him, against the handrail. "I go everywhere alone. I do a good deal of nursing here."

Eric moved a little to shelter her from the cold gusts. "I want to see you, Lee. You'll be getting back to your cottage in a little while, won't you?"

"No."

The short, sharp refusal jarred Eric. He wanted to believe that this was Leda's pride speaking, her natural woman's pride, punishing him for his long neglect. But he had the impression—and it chilled him all through—that she wished he had never come back to Gillin Run. That he was no longer any part of her plans or life.

Leda took the flashlight again. She said: "I'm going over on North Pawpaw to visit the Dentons a few days. There's a term-end vacation at school. I won't be seeing you again, Eric, so—" She offered him her hand.

ERIC stared at her, dumfounded. Leaving the Run, till after he'd gone—it looked as though she was deliberately going away during his visit. She was saying that he would not see her or talk to her again. That he was to have no chance whatever of building back with her.

He refused to have it so. He was remembering their last morning—the initials, her kiss, the young sweetness of her; and he could not believe he was nothing at all to her now. He ignored her hand. He said haltingly, "Lee, it's been a long time, a long empty time," and he took her in his arms again, as on that morning long ago.

He felt Leda's whole body quiver, and for a moment he believed she was yielding to his arms. He bent to kiss her. But Leda turned her lips aside.

"Eric—*don't!*" She struggled to free herself. "I'm not a person you can came back to after eleven years and have for the taking! For a few days of association!"

"But Lee, it isn't a few days. It's not that way—"

She cut in bitterly: "I don't care how it is—there mustn't be *any* association. Yes, that's why I'm not staying here. You mustn't as much as speak to me again. I won't allow it!" She whirled away and fairly ran on across the footbridge. . . .

In Tobe Tolliver's store, as the time wore on toward midnight, Eric kept

swinging the talk back to the "accidents" and trying to see some connection between them. It helped him forget the footbridge and Leda. And for the sake of the dozen old friends of his around the stove and counters of the room he wanted to nail the unknown person before the man could strike again.

As he glanced around at Boone, Sid, Rocky, Hite, he felt that their good-will toward him was one of the fine experiences of his life. They were poor men, their lot was rough and hard, and they could well have resented his success. But they were wholly glad of it and proud of him, and they talked of having a big doctor house run up for him when he got back from the fighting.

Eric knew how badly he was needed on the Run. He knew the helplessness and panic when sickness struck at one of their homes—miles from any doctor or hospital. But to live there where every path and stone breathed of Leda and he would meet her constantly—no, he could not be coming back to Gillin Run at war's end. Not now.

Warily saying nothing about the incident on the rimrock, he studied the men closely as they talked. He felt that he was fighting a silent duel with a brainy person who might be sitting in that very room and who was entirely too shrewd to be taken by any ordinary means.

The more superstitious of the men had no doubts whatever that the deaths were the work of a ha'nt. When Aaron Butler walked off the cliff four years ago while night hunting, a ha'nt, they said, had pushed him off. When Will Follett shot himself while cleaning his deer rifle, a ha'nt had put a sleeper cartridge into Will's gun. When Jord Lingard got killed in an explosion at his small sawmill, just before Christmas, a ha'nt had tied down the governor on Jord's engine boiler.

A couple of the men, chiefly Hugh Gillin, insisted that the deaths were plain hapchance. Last week, Hugh said, a cornice stone had tumbled from the old Gillin house and nearly killed *him*, and he asked sarcastically if ha'nts threw hundred-pound stones at people in broad day.

When the meeting broke up at midnight, Eric stepped outside with Boone Davis, who was deputy for the Run. He believed that Boone would talk more freely to him alone and might know some fact which would be the key here.

As they walked slowly toward the footbridge, Boone invited, "Esther and I'd be purely glad to have you put up with us, Eric, and we'd liken to show you our three."

"I'll not fail visiting you," Eric said. "But for what sleeping I'll do tonight I'll just spread a blanket at the back of Tobe's store." He asked: "Boone, you don't really believe there's a ha'nt on the Run, do you?"

BOONE filled his birch-marl pipe slowly. "The kind of a ha'nt that frights me, Eric, isn't that poor night thing which, they say, rattles around in old houses and gibbers at people on nights liken this. The ha'nt that's bad is the kind gets into a fellow's head and heart. That's the kind does the devil's own ugly work. And there's more than one such ha'nt amongst us on Gillin Run."

Eric nodded. The Run did have its share of feuds and bad blood, of people gripped by forces which had come with them out of the mists of childhood.

He probed, "Do you know of anybody, Boone, who might have wanted Jord Lingard put away?"

Boone shook his head. "All the Run felt glad when Jord finally worked out the money to buy a sawmill of his own. And we was all glad—being's your hat wasn't in the ring for her—that he'd got Leda to promise him."

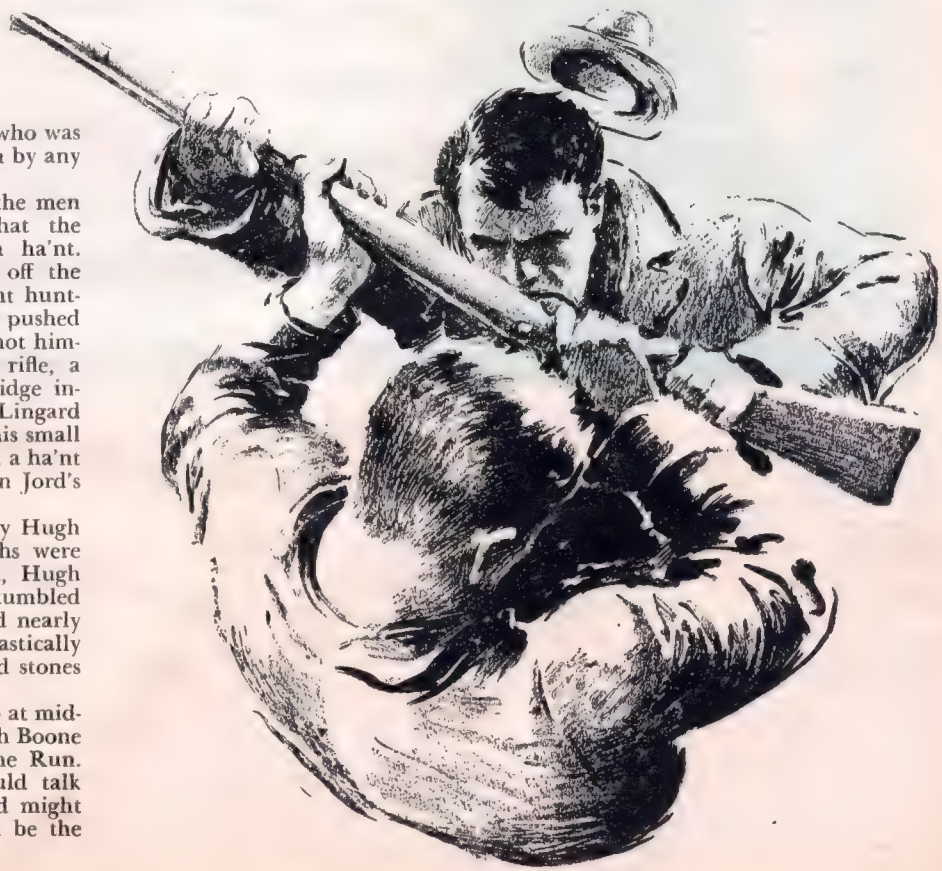
Eric stopped short. "Leda and him—promised?"

Boone said quietly, "Their marriage was set for New Year; Jord was taken three days before Christmas."

Eric winced. Leda, engaged, to another man— He walked along in silence, nursing the bitter knowledge that Leda had once been his. He thought, "All that is dead with her now," and he cursed the stern goal which had cost him all his personal life. It had been his own particular ha'nt, that goal—ruling tyrannically in his heart and head. Boone had done better. Boone had given Esther Hardwick a home and three children and the other norms of a woman's existence, and that was what Leda had been wanting all these years.

At the footbridge he said, "I'll let you go on home, Boone." He had got hold of himself again. As he looked out through the leafless trees of the Gillin grove toward Leda's cottage, a queer suspicion was stirring in his mind. It was so vague he could hardly put it into words. It seemed preposterous, and he pushed it away from him. But it kept flouncing back.

When Boone bade him good-night and left, he decided to visit Leda's



Eric tore the rifle from Hugh's grasp and they fell to the ground, locked in a grapple.



cottage and have a look around. He hated to sneak into anyone's home like that, but the visit might mean life or death for somebody.

Instead of going around by the path, where another "accident" might be waiting, he headed out through the old grove.

Somewhere in the scud overhead he heard a lost curlew's plaintive calling, like notes of a small silver bell. The cold glow of foxfires looked at him from stumps and fallen trees. He saw the white flashes of three deer which had come out of Fern Cove to forage for knobby apples in the gray old orchard, and they seemed like a symbol of the wilderness which had crept back over most of the once-big Gillin holdings. In pioneer times the fiery Gillins had owned the entire valley and had made it prosperous with their farms, mills and logging outfits. Now the clan had come down to only two people. As he passed the gaunt big house he saw a light in the attic room where Hugh's recluse aunt had lived for twenty years, and a light showed in the west L where Hugh spent most of his time, cursing the Gillin property while the remains of the estate fell to pieces around him.

"You mustn't speak to me again."

At Leda's cottage he opened the door and stepped into the living-room. Her fireplace log had burned to red coals, and by their glow he glanced around, thinking how expressive the room was of her. Neat and homelike, it was faintly scented with sassafras, gathered on one of her hill trips; a sheaf of school papers lay on the table; a box of candy and a book stood on the small stand by the sofa.

Between the living-room and bedroom he noticed an alcove, like a library nook, with her piano, books, mementos; and he stepped over to it, cupping a match. On the window ledge stood a dozen photos—of various pupils, hill-scapes, women friends of hers, and three men. With a twinge of jealousy he gazed at the picture of Jord Lingard, a handsome, likable man of his own age. Then his eyes traveled to the photo of Aaron

Butler, whom he'd known well. The third man was a stranger, but the inscription *"Will"* across a corner led him to guess it was Will Follett.

As he looked at the little array, he realized that these men had represented Leda's want of a life companion, home and children. And with them she'd known disappointment. He forgot his jealousy in sympathy for that disappointment. He wondered if these men had been second-best with her, after that first-love, as any woman would be second-best with him after Leda. He thought, "They all three met accidents—Aaron, Will Follett and Jord." In the next breath a jolt went through him like an electric shock. Here was exactly the sort of thing he'd come to her cottage to look for! These photos proved his suspicion. Here was the connection between those ugly happenings. The common denominator. These three men had each gone with Leda. Each was a man she might have married. *There* was the reason they had met "accidents." They had simply but effectively been removed.

Outside he heard a stray dog snarl and make off but he paid no attention. The outlines of a story were shaping up in his mind. Years ago some man on Gillin Run, some person of violent nature, had fallen in love with Leda. She had turned him down, the disappointment had rankled with him, and then jealousy had got in its deadly work when he saw her going with Aaron Butler. Step by step he had come to the point where he had arranged an "accident" to keep Aaron from having her. Later Will Follett, then Jord—

IN the living-room a window flung open, and a rifle crashed from the darkness outside. Eric was standing inside the small arch of the alcove and could not see the flare of the gun. Three bullets burned past him and struck into the bedroom door—into the full-length mirror on it. The rattle of glass made him whirl to look. In the feeble light he seemed to be seeing himself, grotesquely wounded; and it was a second before he realized that this was his reflection in the shattered glass. Then it dawned on him that his enemy outside had been deceived by the mirror image and had put three bullets into it heart-high.

Keeping flat against the wall, he edged past the piano to the window, opened it noiselessly, slipped outside and started around the house, to have it out with the man. He remembered how his enemy had slipped away from him on the cliff top, and he swore it would not happen again. He swore that the ha'nt of Gillin Run was abroad for the last time.

In those few seconds while he was creeping toward the cottage corner he saw through to the identity of this person. He had no tangible facts, no ordinary proof, but he knew. It was the memory of a character pattern that showed him, as by a lightning flash. He was thinking of how a vicious-tempered boy, years ago, used to claim the best wild-fruit trees as his property, the best ginseng hollows, and threaten to shoot anybody who trespassed—exactly as now the man considered Leda his own. He remembered how that boy had chained up his bird-dog and starved it because it refused to hunt with him but would hunt with Boone and Hite. And so he knew who the man was. This ha'nt was Hugh Gillin.

He thought: "So that's why Hugh told about that falling cornice stone—to turn suspicion from himself. . . . Cagey, like his man-traps."

BUT he could not think why Hugh wanted to kill *him*. With this rifle blast Hugh had stepped out of the ha'nt rôle for the first time. Had done something which could not possibly be laid to accident. What had goaded the man like that? Jealousy about Leda? Surely Hugh, with his shrewd insight, knew that she had dropped Eric Eveland out of her life. *Or had she?*

At the cottage corner he stopped to reconnoiter, guessing that somewhere in the darkness just ahead Hugh Gillin was waiting for him, with rifle at alert. The window of the living-room was less than ten steps away. He looked hard at the shrubbery outside of it, but with the setting moon the night had turned too black for him to locate his enemy. He listened intently and heard nothing.

Groping around, he gathered several small stones, straightened up, and carefully tossed the stones into a clump of shrubs out to his left. At the rustle in the clump a rifle flared in the blackness by a rose trellis.

Tensed and ready, Eric launched himself at the reddish flare. Before the rifle could swing in his direction, he was across to the trellis and smashing into the dark figure that crouched there.

He tore the rifle from Hugh's grasp and they fell to the ground, locked in a grapple. For a few chaotic moments, as he felt Hugh's greater weight and strength, Eric saw himself losing this battle and losing his life. But he fought on, savagely. He had fought Hugh Gillin before, in boys' quarrels; he had seen Hugh lose nerve and cave in; and now he waited, battling doggedly, for that coward pattern to be repeated.

It came, as he had known it would. All unexpectedly Hugh stopped grappling and struggled to break free. When that failed, he went completely to pieces, shaking, begging for his life.

Eric strapped his wrists with his belt. "Don't worry," he panted, "I'm not killing you. I'm handing you over to Boone. But before that we're going to have a talk. I want to know why I was on your list. Why I was first of all."

When Boone and Hite Dixon brought Leda home, sometime after three, he had her cottage straightened up and a bright fire going in the living-room. The two men left her at the door and she came on into the house alone.

He helped her take off her raincape and led her over to the fire. He looked at her, silent, and again he was shaken by that awareness of her womanhood. Her hands were cold; he cupped them in his own and warmed them with his breath, as he had done many times with a very little girl whose name was Leda.

He said: "You knew I was in danger here on the Run, didn't you, Lee? You knew that if you let me visit you it might cost me my life, didn't you? You knew, or at least you dreadfully suspected, that any man who had a serious chance with you was in line for an 'accident.' That's why you went away and why you were so upset when we met on the footbridge and why you wouldn't allow me even to talk to you again. Isn't it Lee?"

Leda nodded, and the fire gleamed in her hair. She said, "I knew it was Hugh, but I didn't have any bit of proof, Eric. The only way I could guard you was to go away."

"But you didn't have to slam the door on me so hard, Lee. You should have let me know that I had a little chance still."

SHE asked him, pointedly, "But *do* you have, Eric?"

"I do have!" He glanced at her bedroom door. "I went in there after talking with Hugh, Lee. I saw the picture on your dresser, as he said. The picture of myself. It's been there all these years, Hugh told me—set apart from the others. Not that I deserve it, Lee, but—I do have a chance. Imagine my finding out so tremendous a thing in a way like that!"

Leda flushed violently. She fought against him as he took her in his arms. In her eyes he saw hot tears—of anger and shame and love she could not deny. He kissed her wind-cold cheek, and all the protest suddenly went out of her. He heard her whispered: "Eric—you did—*come back.*" He felt her arms creeping around him, and it was altogether like that morning at the sentinel beech

Desert Nurse

A DRAMA OF THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN, BY THE BRITISH OFFICER WHO WROTE THE RED WOLF OF ARABIA STORIES.

by WILLIAM MAKIN



MAYBE we had all drunk more than was good for us. But in wartime Cairo this hotel was only tolerable when seen through a haze of alcohol. The interior decorations suggested they had been conceived by someone in the same spirit. As a background for the procession of khaki figures, it was more dingy than the desert.

We sat at a table in the hall flanking the elevator. A strategic position suggested by the Brigadier himself. He had an eye for the feminine form, even though in Cairo it was mostly in uniform. He sat there, laughing continuously at some droll thought as he kept his strategic eye on that constantly opening grille of the elevator. The fezzed operator was indolently indifferent to his passengers. Not so the Brigadier.

"Now, there's a figure for an artist," he chuckled, nodding in the direction of a short-skirted, felt-hatted figure wearing the orange shoulder tabs of the South African Army. "I give credit to these South African girls as being the best-looking bunch here."

"Can't say I appreciate girls in uniform," drawled Captain Swaithes, the official war artist. "They're much more appealing in civvies."

Instinctively Swaithes tugged his natty uniform into shape. A first-rate artist with only one fault: he was more passionately interested in ideas than paint.

"Well, we have to dress our Amazons in uniforms now that they insist upon coming to battle with us," chuckled the Brigadier.

"But need their uniforms be so unattractive? Consider the shapelessness of the military nurse in her outdoor uniform."

"I am considering it," laughed the Brigadier, regarding a figure just emerging from the elevator. The gray



"Früchs sat up in bed. 'What are you doing here?' he snapped. 'Attending the wounded,' she replied calmly."

skirt and the gray cloak edged with scarlet were stiff and formal enough. The Queen Alexandra metal badge glistened against her breast. Above it was the strip of three medal ribbons of the Great War. Her slightly graying hair, still glinting with gold, was tucked severely and correctly beneath her felt hat. A figure of detached aloofness, and yet with a grace that immediately attracted the attention.

She stared directly ahead. Any severity in her expression was entirely lost in the humorous wrinkles at her eyes and the full softness of her lips ready to break into a smile.

"Now, there's a beauty of a woman," breathed the Brigadier, fumbling for his glass.

"She *is* a beauty, in more senses than one," admitted Swaithes.

"In her exciting forties, too," appraised the Brigadier, not listening. "A type I always longed to marry—and never did. I was too young then; now I'm too old." He swallowed his drink at one gulp and rose. "I'll see you fellows later."

"Come up to my room," drawled Swaithes after his retreating form. "I'll show you some pictures."

"Damn your pictures," said the Brigadier, over his shoulder.

He disappeared into the reading-room after the nurse.

Swaithes sighed, and looked at me.

"I'll be glad to see your pictures," I said politely.

From the cheap wooden wardrobe of his bedroom, Swaithes brought forth his latest canvases. He displayed them against the washstand, beneath the unshaded electric light. A paltry atmosphere in which to display art, and Swaithes was very conscious of it. After all, he had exhibited in the Leicester Galleries, where oatmeal carpets and delicate hangings had helped to tone his lavish colorings. Now he was painting war scenes in the Western Desert, and exhibiting them to a solitary person in a bedroom in Cairo. But the pictures triumphed over the background.

"Here," sighed Swaithes, "I'll show you a real war picture. It's only a rough at present, but I like it. Of course it will be rejected at once by the soldierly hanging committee at Headquarters."

He rummaged a little excitedly in the wardrobe, brought forth a small canvas, and propped it against the washstand. In the ghostly light flung



"'So!' nodded the staff officer. 'This will do excellently.' He gazed incuriously at Sister Martyn. 'Who are you?' he asked, in German."

by the white folds of the tent, a figure lay naked to the waist on an improvised operating-table. There was an ugly red gash at the chest.

Over this, a shirt-sleeved doctor was probing in the wound. A nurse, swift urgency in her pose, stood by the side of the warrior. The painter had caught all the desperation of two people trying to save a man whose life was ebbing away before their eyes. The folds of the tent had the suggestion of a curtain being drawn aside from the grim scene. The canvas held the spectator by the stark horror of the moment.

With an effort I drew my gaze away from the canvas and looked up at Swaithes.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked with affected carelessness.

"You're beginning to think like Goya," I said.

"Pah!" he said. "Here, let's have another drink." He pressed a long, lean finger against the bell. "I marveled at being able to sit in the shadows of that tent and rough out the scene while those two tried to save his life. I knew he was a goner. It stared out of his eyes when I first painted him. In any case, what the hell could I do? I'm only a blasted painter."

There was a thundering knock at the door. It was opened to reveal a huge Nubian in a dirty nightshirt.

"Get me a bottle of whisky and a jug of water," ordered Swaithes. "And don't be all night about it."

WHEN the Nubian had disappeared, Swaithes turned to me.

"Perhaps you think I'm seeing this war all crooked. Headquarters, having put me in uniform, seem to expect me to paint pictures with the Union Jack fluttering bravely in the foreground. I can only paint that sort of pictures with my eyes shut. And believe me, I keep my eyes well open in the desert. Perhaps because of that I see things as I do."

"You've changed. Someone once called you a popular painter."

"You think I should make war popular?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, anyone who calls himself an artist would fail at doing so. Most who have to fight wars see but little romance in it, like my Australian. Courage, fortitude—plenty of that. But you'd find the same qualities in any hospital ward in peacetime."

"That Australian seems to have taught you a lot."

"Perhaps not so much as the nurse whom you see bending over his body," said Swaithes, indicating the canvas.

"You make a mystery of her face by showing only her back," I laughed. "Not that it's an unattractive back."

"It attracted our Brigadier, anyhow," grunted Swaithes.

"You don't mean—"

He nodded.

"The nurse who walked out of the elevator was the same nurse I painted in that picture. A woman in a thousand, I assure you."

"She seems to have inspired you as Mona Lisa did Leonardo da Vinci."

"There's a spirit in that woman—" Swaithes stopped. "But why should I tell the tale?"

"I'd like to hear it. Especially now that we have the whisky."

THE Nubian had appeared like a genie as Swaithes rubbed his chin, reflectively. A bottle of whisky was dumped on the washstand in front of the canvas, and two glasses, dubiously clean, were placed beside them.

Swaithes was generous with the whisky.

"I pieced together the story of Sister Martyn from three or four different accounts," said Swaithes. "You know how it is in the desert—you talk with someone at a tank laager, at a refueling depot, at an ammunition dump or even in a field dispensary, and the gossip is parochial. Sister Martyn was the sort of woman few people forgot when once they met her. But the man who told me the most revealing story about her was in a prison-camp. He was Hauptmann Hans Früchs of the Afrika Korps under General Rommel."

"A German officer prisoner?" I asked.

Swaithes nodded.

"He had every reason for telling the truth about that remarkable woman. Früchs had been taken prisoner in the first big tank battle at El Agheila. He was extremely annoyed at the fact. His own Mark IV tank with its powerful gun was superior to anything we had in the field against him, but a lucky hit from one of our tanks had put the tractor out of action. When the Panzers withdrew, Früchs and two of his men found themselves marooned. Another German in the tank had been killed at the first hit.

"Even so, Früchs and his men continued to fight from their tank with revolver and rifle. Our fellows had surrounded this piece of ironmongery, which lay static in the desert. But apparently the Germans had a good supply of ammunition. The job had been left to South African infantry who were mopping-up after our tanks had gone on in pursuit of the Panzers. The South Africans lay behind sand dunes, peppering the tank with their rifles. Some fellows squirmed close and pitched hand grenades. They hit the stranded tank again and again. But each time they tried to rush it, a deadly fire snapped back at them.

"Then one of our own tanks came lumbering over the horizon. A mechanical hitch had made it late for the battle, and the crew, swearing volubly at their bad luck, were trying to regain the main force. Some of our infantry told them of the difficulty of capturing this stranded fortress which lay half on its side. The British tank officer, his face and dungarees smeared with oil and almost as black as his beret, listened to the tale. 'Leave the bloody Jerry to us,' was his brief comment.

"He closed the hatch, and the baffled South Africans watched the tank go into action. It was not altogether a one-sided affair. Although the German tank was static, it still had the use of that powerful gun which could be swiveled in almost any direction. And the tank itself was more heavily armored than the British. Früchs brought his gun into action at once, and nearly ended the duel there and then. He manipulated the gun himself and pitched a shell which almost caught the British tank full on. But it was a near miss. Smothered with sand from the explosion, the British tank emerged and made a respectful detour before lurching forward again.

"For the infantry, crouching behind the sand dunes as breathless spectators, it was an exciting duel between heavyweights. A British shell pitched squarely into the German tank, almost knocking it over. The watching South Africans cheered as, with a roar from accelerated engine and racing tractors, the British tank charged to deal the final blow.

"But from that torn and jagged piece of ironmongery, the gun barked again. The British tank reeled like a boxer taking an uppercut to the jaw. In fact, it was lifted some yards by the impact, which was just as well, for the next shell from the German missed it by just those few yards. The British tank commander was swearing volubly. Two of his men were wounded. 'Something is blasted well wrong with Agatha today,' he apostrophized his tank. He scrambled toward the gun himself, and gave orders to the driver.

"They came in upon the German from a new direction. They got in two frightful smacks from this side. Part of some German anatomy was flung into the sky with all the unreality of a Hollywood dummy. The German gun got off another shell full in the face of the advancing British tank but it was too late. Like a destroyer ramming the enemy, the British tank tore into the German and rested there, its battered nose pointing to the sky, and the tractors racing noisily. The German tank was crumpled like a child's toy that someone had stamped upon. A tense silence followed the death-grapple of these machines.

"Then, pistol in hand, the British officer stepped forth. He advanced warily. He called out to the Germans to surrender. There was no reply. The men behind the sand dunes began to crawl forth. One raised a hand-grenade to throw. But the officer waved him away with his pistol. There was no life left in the tank, and that small blue flame had started which would explode, once it reached the petrol tank.

"Slumping out of the German tank, blood trickling from his forehead, was Früchs. He looked dead enough, but the men crept cautiously toward him. The British tank officer was the first to reach him, and after a moment's inspection, began tugging at the body. 'Come and help,' he yelled to the others. 'This Jerry is still alive.' The South Africans scrambled forward. They got him out and let him lie in the sand like a doll spilling sawdust, and then dragged the British wounded from their tank. All the other Germans were dead. They got the wounded away just in time. The tanks began to blaze, and then blew up as the flames caught the ammunition.

"The South Africans carried the wounded to the nearest dressing-station. The tank officer remained to swear and weep over the wreck of Agatha, who had fought her last battle. Früchs, more dead than alive, opened his eyes as he was carried into the canvas marquee of a field hospital. The first thing he saw was the face of Sister Martyn bending over him. He knew that he was in the hands of the British. He closed his eyes in shame and mortification; a tear ran down his oil- and powder-stained cheek, and mixed with the blood. No one saw it except Sister Martyn.

"ANOTHER drink?" Swaithes suggested, handing me the bottle.

"You tell your story well," I commented. "Were you sitting with a sketch-book behind the sand dunes during that tank battle?"

"Yes, I was a spectator," admitted Swaithes. "Near enough to feel constantly uncomfortable about my safety, but with a superbly imperturbable young officer attached to Army Public Relations to see that I didn't get into trouble. He had, thoughtfully, even brought sandwiches. The one I ate tasted like cotton-wool. Have you ever tried eating under fire?"

"No, I prefer drinking, and the stronger the liquor the better. But go on with your tale. I begin to have a great interest in Sister Martyn," I said, raising my glass.



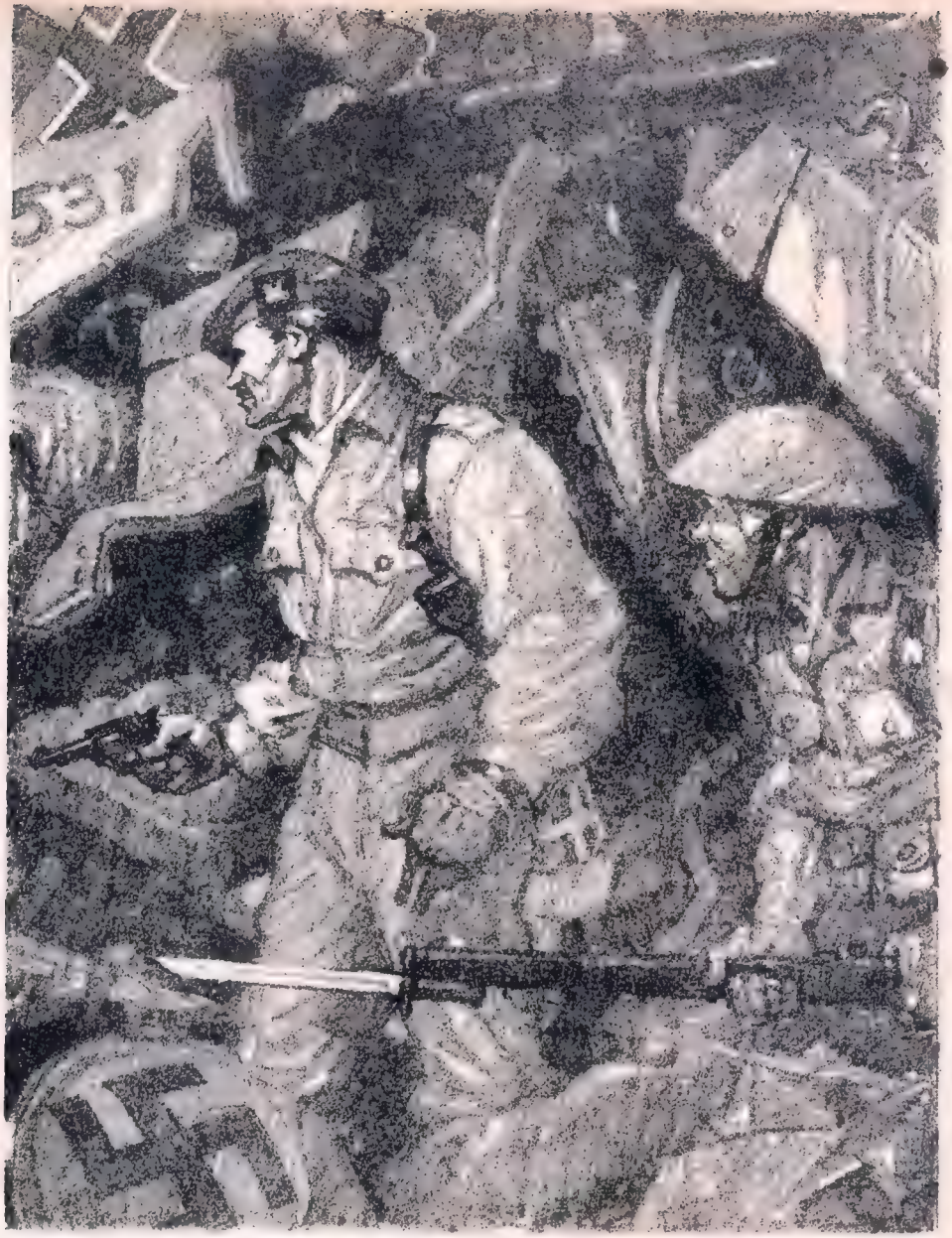
"That tented hospital in the desert was soon pretty full," he went on. "Rommel, as you know, was fighting back ferociously; a few more wounded Germans were brought in, but only a few. The beds were mostly filled with New Zealanders and South Africans. They were grand fellows. They had done their best, and done it damned well against an enemy as clever as they make 'em.

"Sister Martyn had only two rather grim-looking nurses to help her—'raw-boned vestals' as Thackeray would have called them. Sister Martyn worked them like fury for the two hundred patients crowded in that tent in the desert. In the beginning there was a fine surgeon, a major who spent days and nights operating under shaded sunlight or shaded kerosene lights. He achieved miracles and swore violently over them all. Früchs had the grace to thank him for removing some pieces of a grenade-burst from his head. The Major grinned at his patient. 'Interesting job,' he said. Then he cleared out, being called to a bloodier and more crowded hospital in the desert. He left a young R.A.M.C. officer, Captain Luton, in charge. Luton was a dapper fellow, very conscious that he had been at Oxford and St. Mary's hospital.

"'I've heard of both places,' said Sister Martyn, when this dazzling double talent had been whispered to her by one of the two nurses. 'One is the home of lost causes and the other the home of lost swabs.' The nurse stared, uncomprehending, but Früchs chuckled as he overheard the remark. It was the first time he had laughed since he came into that British hospital. Sister Martyn regarded him with that cheerful severity which always lurked in her eyes.

"'So you understand English?'

"'Yes, I also was at Oxford. You are right about the lost causes,' nodded the German. 'I was present at the Oxford Union debate when that famous vote was taken—"This House resolves that it is not necessary



Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"Slumping out of the tank was Früchs. He looked dead but the men crept cautiously toward him."

to fight for King and Country." A fantastic gesture. But where are those who made it? Fighting against us, the Germans, I've no doubt.'

"'They are!' said Sister Martyn. 'Did *you* vote on that resolution?'

"'No. I had no King, and I was rather doubtful about the country. Only when I got back to Germany did I realize that I would fight, and fight gladly!'

"'Why?'

"'You wouldn't understand.'

"'Because you're a Nazi and a believer in Hitler?'

"'I'm not a Nazi, and— Enough!' He flushed. 'It's perhaps because I know my duty and have a keen sense of discipline. Those are the qualities which make good Germans, and it's the lack of them that will destroy the English.'

"'You're still a very sick man. Drink this and try to get some sleep.'

"He looked into her humorous blue eyes. 'I'm sorry about the English, for your sake,' he said.

"But there was no sleep for any of them that night. Rommel had begun one of his swift counter-strokes. You know the magic of that desert devil. He seemed to conjure guns and tanks out of the thin air, from desert visions which our Intelligence declared stoutly to be mirages. They became real enough, however, when the guns, brought up by motor tractors, began to thunder. The heavy shelling and dive-bombing by Stukas of our advanced units grew louder and nearer. At one o'clock in the morning a wounded Indian staggered in and declared that the Germans were in Bengazi again. He was thought to have lost his wits. Someone gave him a stiff injection of morphia and put him to bed.

"It was true enough, as we know now. They only began to believe it in that desert hospital when the scream of a shell and an explosion like a cartload of bricks being tumbled, was heard distinctly in the distance. That was at five o'clock in

the morning. Captain Luton, not so dapper at this moment and definitely unshaven despite his pink face, materialized with a snapping of orders.

"'Get as many as you can out of here into the trucks,' he told Sister Martyn. 'We're evacuating. It's got to be done within half an hour.'

"They rose to the occasion. An astonishing scene! Wounded men helping wounded men. Some carried pick-a-back, while others crawled painfully on all fours. Limping men dragged stretchers on which lay dazed, half-conscious burdens. Erect men stalking through the chaos like sleepwalkers. The truck-drivers doing their bit, one curiously opening a drug cupboard and taking a quick sip from a bottle of pure alcohol. Italian prisoners very much to the fore, anxious to move from that area where shells were now crashing dangerously near.

"IN the midst of the bustle and excitement, Captain Luton pushed an excited face into the tent.

"'That's enough—that's enough. Can't take any more. Let's get going!'

"The two rawboned vestals had disappeared. Sister Martyn was alone in the tent with some five bed cases. These were considered too dangerous or inexpedient to move. They were all Germans, and included Hauptmann Früchs. He, at least, was conscious amidst this scurry of departure. There was a gleam of joy in his ironic eyes as he realized that he had been left. He sat up in bed. Slight bewilderment crossed his features as he glimpsed Sister Martyn calmly preparing an injection for one moaning, restless patient who had been left behind.

"'What are you doing here?' he snapped.

"'Attending the wounded,' she replied, calmly dabbing iodine on the man's hairy arm.

"'Hasn't everybody else gone?'

"'I believe they have.'

"'And yet you remain? Why?'

"She pressed home the needle of the hypodermic. Then, competently, she sterilized it.

"'Because I think it my duty to stay, I suppose, she said quietly.

"'But weren't you given orders to evacuate, to leave?' he asked.

"'I didn't hear any such orders,' she replied calmly. 'And if I did, I don't suppose I should have obeyed.'

"He began to speak, but his words were lost in the whine of a shell that grew instantly into a roar. Instinctively he crouched on the bed, a fearful expression in his eyes. Things were photographed as if with stereoscopic clarity on his mind. He saw, as though in a distant film, Sister Martyn calmly reach out for the pulse of the man who had been given morphia, and with her fingers resting lightly and her gaze toward a wristwatch, count the beats.

"The shell crashed, so it seemed in the uproar almost outside the hospital tent. Dust and sand came in a hot wave. Somewhere a pole snapped noisily, and the canvas sagged. In a few seconds the dust cleared. Sister Martyn was still holding the pulse, and her lips were counting steadily.

"'*Himmel*—but you're wonderful!' he cried in German to himself.

"Events continued to happen with almost clockwork regularity. Shells exploded in the immediate vicinity. The blast from one flung an empty bed across the tent. The piece of ironmongery quivered like a shocked human. Only the man Früchs guffawed at the sight. Sister Martyn turned on him, anger in her blue eyes.

"'Be quiet, you fool,' she snapped.

"He flushed hotly, was about to say something, but lay back and watched her as she moved swiftly about the tent, conjuring a glass of water from somewhere for a German who moaned aloud his thirst.

"A shell had caught a petrol dump near by. The roar of the flames could be heard. Queer lights and shadows were flung against the canvas walls. Giant forms crossed the screen. There was the crunching of wheels in the sand mixed with grunted blasphemies. The last mechanized British forces were on the retreat.

"'Why don't you shout to them and get a lift?' he asked her, sitting bolt upright in bed.

"'I told you to be quiet,' she said, busy with another patient.

"'They'll take you willingly if they know you're here,' he insisted. 'This is no place for a woman.'

"'I rather think this *is* the place for a woman,' she retorted coldly.

"He was bitterly angry. He lapsed into German, cursing her folly. She went on with her work, indifferently. That enraged him all the more. He rose from his bed, staggered to the floor and made an effort to drive her forth. She came to him, her eyes blazing, and in a cold fury thrust him back into bed.

"'You will obey *my* orders while I am here,' she said.

"He was ready to strike her. She faced him fearlessly. It was then she noticed his gaze had traveled past her and was directed toward the folds of the doorway. A German staff officer with two lieutenants and five dust-smeared soldiers stood there.

"'So!' nodded the staff officer. 'This will do excellently. Fifty men can be billeted here.' He gazed incuriously at Sister Martyn. 'Who are you?' he asked, in German.

"It was Früchs who replied:

"'She is the sister in charge of the hospital.'

"'English?'

"'Yes.'

"'Why did she stay on?'

"'She said it was her duty—and she is English. I never thought—'

"'She is a fool. Tell her in English that I want this tent for the billeting of fifty men.'

"Früchs translated the request. She faced the group of Germans.

"'Tell him,' she said quietly, 'that this is a hospital, and there is room here for only wounded men.'

"'I don't think you understand—' he began.

"'I understand perfectly,' she said. 'Tell this swaggering officer I will take no such orders, not even from the General himself.'

"With a shrug of his shoulders, Früchs began to translate. The face of the staff officer purpled. He bared his teeth for an insolent reply.

"Früchs took up the tale, but the staff officer stopped the spate of words by raising a gloved hand.

"'Very well,' he snapped. 'As you say. This place shall remain for only the wounded—the German wounded!' With a sudden jerk of his lithe body, the staff officer was gone, his lieutenants at his heels.

"A strange silence seemed to have descended upon the hospital tent. It remained only for Früchs to stretch his arms upward in a wide gesture. His pink face was glistening.

"'What is it?' asked Sister Martyn.

"'Free!' he declared. 'No longer a prisoner of war. No longer a captured man among the British. I'm free and with my own men—'

"'Get back into bed,' she commanded.

"His arms dropped. He was suddenly deflated. He had glimpsed a tear in those otherwise humorous eyes. The fortune of war had reversed their respective positions. He realized as he saw the droop in her lips that she was suffering intensely. *She* was the prisoner of war now."

SWAITHES drained his glass and looked reflectively at the bottle of whisky.

"I wonder what has happened to our Brigadier?" he said.

Brought back suddenly to the bedroom, the canvases propped against the washstand and the hot smells of a Cairo night stealing through the shutters, I sighed.

"Does it matter?" I asked. "They say that generals die in bed, so perhaps brigadiers perish in bars. . . . Is that the end of the story?"

Swaithes laughed.

"Isn't it good enough for you?"

"Well, give me the anti-climax, if I must have it," I grumbled. "Why



"'Take the track to the right. Before you have gone a mile, the British will pick you up,' he said."

should we have seen Sister Martyn an hour ago walking through the lounge of this hotel while you tell a story picked up from a German officer in a prison camp?"

"Quixotic behavior," Swaithes replied. "The incomprehensible. As the romantic Mr. Kipling had *Mulvaney* remark, there's a deal happens in the field that doesn't get into the field orders."

"Go on."

"Three days later Hauptmann Früchs was ordered to report for duty. He came in very smart in his new field-gray, his boots polished, his face close-shaven and pink. He regarded the prisoner of war, Sister Martyn, as she moved about the hospital tent. She was perhaps a little bowed, a little more humbled.

"'Come outside for a moment,' he said to her.

"'I'm busy,' she replied.

"She saw that despite his spruceness there was considerable turmoil going on behind that pink face. She followed him into the sunshine of the desert. It almost blinded her after the days and nights spent in the gray shrouded atmosphere of the tent, that grayness which came over the faces of men as they died. She vaguely discerned a small military car with the stiff automaton of a German soldier standing beside it.

"'Get in,' he said abruptly.

"'Why?'

"'Get in,' he repeated.

"She turned away, swiftly. Früchs gave a signal to the soldier; together, they almost threw her into the car. The engine was already running, and Früchs took his seat at the wheel. She made a final effort to free herself. Früchs roughly flung her back. The next moment he had the car speeding along the desert road.

"'Where are you taking me?' she shouted above the rattle of the engine.

"THERE was no smile on his face. It was set grimly. It continued so as he drove hour after hour over the desert. At one period he replenished his petrol-tank from a German convoy in the desert. Then he drove on again. Occasionally he referred to his map and compass. They hardly spoke to each other. She was very angry. He seemed disinclined to talk. He never even looked up when the throbbing of metal insects overhead told them both that they were again in the battle area. Only when he was speeding along a well-marked desert track did he reach out suddenly for the brakes.

"'This,' said Früchs, 'is as far as I go. Get out. . . . Take the track to the right, and walk straight ahead. Before you have gone a mile, the blasted British will pick you up.'

"Sister Martyn looked at Früchs and smiled sadly. 'Why have you done this for me?' she asked.

"Früchs' lips curled scornfully. 'Women! Discipline! Perhaps they are the same the world over! Let's not discuss my reason. . . . I go back to my men now.

"He was gone in the desert dust before she could reply.

Swaithes poured out a couple of drinks from the whisky bottle.

"Make it three" rumbled a voice in the doorway.

Brigadier Watson stood there. It may have been my fancy, but he seemed to carry himself sheepishly.

"Finished your amatory adventures?" asked Swaithes, reaching out for another glass.

The Brigadier chuckled in his stomach.

"Adventures are for the adventurous only, so I've decided."

"She turned you down?"

"I suppose so," he laughed. "I followed her into the reading-room. I dared to go up and ask her if there was anything I could do for her. She looked at me with those blue eyes—ah, they're beautiful, but they saw me through frosted glass—and said: 'That's very kind of you, Brigadier. Will you send a waiter to me?' Then she dismissed me with the same ease that I give a drunk ten days C. B. I positively slunk away. I don't think there's much to women. . . . Here's luck!"

He raised the glass with appreciation.

Nothing

Illustrated by Charles Chickering



"UNTIL next spring," said "Squaredeal Sam" McGhee, "or August at the latest. It aint like I was astin' you to *give* me the money. It's just a loan, on an investment as sound as the Rock o' Prudential, so to speak—" He eyed me with hope.

I frowned at him severely. "And just why," I asked, "do you need three hundred dollars?"

"Well," said Squaredeal Sam, "it's a long story—" His gaze wandered to the box of cigars on my desk. I nodded; he took one, and lighting it, he leaned back, exuding wreaths of Havana fragrance.

Like maybe I sometime told you (Sam began), I'm the original hard-luck kid. Everything happens to me—most of it bad. For instance, just atter I signed a contract with Marty Kildare, the smoothest light heavy which ever flang leather in a squared circle, along come Pearl Harbor, an' Marty switched over to *another* manager named Sam for the duration.

Course, bein' an honest kid like he is, Marty sends me my right an' legal commission every month, but ten per cent of a private's pay aint exactly what'll support me in the style to which I'd like to become accustomed.

So, since it looks like the boxfightin' game is all washed up till atter Hitler an' Hirohito is likewise, I began lookin' around for a job in some more essential war industry. The way I figger it, one o' the most essential war industries in these times is the race-track racket. Guys can't squander their money on frivialities like silk shirts an' the etcetera if the bookies got it, an' that prevents inflation. So I ast a few questions an' pulled strings, an' come spring, I was in Florida with the gee-gee circuit.

Well, right off the bat I got a break. I hooked up with this guy name of Tom Akers—the owner of a small stable—which he was reclassified 1-A when his draft-board happened to find out he could see lightnin' an' hear thunder. So he'd been called up; an' he ast would I run his string till he got back. Which I would.

Atter we signed a contract, I seen Akers down to the depot, an' since the train was a couple hours late, I an' him sat around bendin' elbows to wild the time away. First Akers toasted me; then I toasted him, an' *vicey-versy*—an' to make a long story short, by the time the train arrove, we was both pretty well done on both sides. So I poured him into his car an' went back to the stables to have a look at the nags I was now manager of which.

Confidentially, they wasn't the classiest outfit of hay-burners I ever met up with. They looked less like racin' horses than fugitives from a black market.

in the Rules

A cockeyed story, by
Nelson Bond

Readin' from left to right in the stalls, there was Robin Hood, a geldin' with bow legs, a narrow forehead, an' a quiver; a colt named Runningboard, who done the first like he was the second; one named Pitiful, who was; one named Speedy, who wasn't; an' one named Willwin, who wouldn't.

The only likely-lookin' prospect of the bunch was a filly named Princess Sally, a two-year old maiden which Akers hadn't never raced yet on account of she was a bag of nerves. Accordin' to her test runs, she was greased lightnin', but she was scared of startin'-gates. Every time they put her in, she started kickin' like a front-row chorine.

To make matters worse, along with this accumulation of unground roundsteaks, I'd inherited an alleged assistant by name of Dumbo, a tow-headed little squirt with oversized ears an' adenoids. He had five thumbs on each hand an' an impediment in his brain. He served as a combination trainer, swipe an' jockey for the Akers colors. Why? Your guess is as good as mine. Maybe the fact that Akers owed him seventeen months' back pay had somethin' to do with it.

He was in Princess Sally's stall, rubbin' her down, when I wandered by. I stared at him for a minute.





"Looks like he's eligible," the Commissioner said. "What race do you want to enter him in?"

"Hi!" I said.

He looked up, noddin' an' flappin' his ears gently.

"'Lo!" he said.

"Jack an' game!" chimed in a voice from the adjoinin' stall. "Down two, doubled an' vulnerable. Wheeee!"

I started. "Who's that?" I ast.

Dumbo shrugged. "Oh, just *him*," he said. "Pretend like you don't hear him, an' he'll shut up. What can I do for you, Mister?"

"The name's McGhee," I told him, "an' I'll tell you atter I've had a look around. I'm your new manager. Your old boss has gone to war."

He gawked at me. "What for?"

"Because he had to. The Government called him up."

"They did?" said Dumbo. "Gee! That must have cost a lot of money, huh?"

"*What* cost a lot of money?"

"A telephone call all the way from Washington."

I glared at him suspiciously. "Now, looky here!" I said. "If you're tryin' to be funny—"

Dumbo wriggled, sort of embarrassed-like. He said: "D-did I say somethin' wrong, Mr. McGhee? I'm sorry. Honest, I am. Seems like I'm always sayin' the wrong thing. I guess I better rub down the Princess." An' he started spongin' the filly again. But not for long. That voice from the next-door stall called him.

"Never mind her—come in here an' take care of me! I want my back curried!" The voice lifted in sudden raucous song: "*Curry me back to old Virginny—*"

"Hey!" I demanded. "What *is* this?"

Dumbo said: "I told you, Mister, he's a pest. Just let on like you don't hear him."

"But who's in there?" I said. "A talkin' horse? It aint that Egbert Haw I read about in a magazine?"

The ears waggled negatively. "I don't know nothin' about no talkin' horses, Mr. McGhee. But he aint one."

"It's a man, then? But what in blazes is a *man* doin' in a horse's stall?"

"We-e-ell," said Dumbo dubiously, "he aint exactly a man, neither. He's sort of—well, sort of peculiar."

I strode to the other stall. The door was shut. I opened the top half

—an' jumped a yard. Leanin' with folded arms over the lower gate was a glinty-eyed little rascal with a fringe of chin-whiskers an' an impy grin. Or not exactly a grin—a *leer,* more like. An' no wonder. 'Cause as far as I could see, he didn't have a stitch of clothes on!

I yelled: "For cryin' out loud—what makes here?"

"*I* do," said the guy, "when I can. Hyah, chum! So you're the new boss?"

"Who are you?" I hollered. "An' what are you doin' in there? An' where did you come from? An' for Pete's sake, go get some clothes on!"

"Nestros," smirked the stranger, "waitin' for something to eat, Thessaly, an' don't ask questions so fast. Did you say clothes? Nonsense! Garments are for stupid humans!"

Sayin' which, he swished a long bushy tail into my eyes, turned an' cantered around the stall proudly. I stared at him—an' moaned. He had the body of a man down as far as his floatin' ribs. From there on—he was a *horse!* . . . .

An inch of ash tumbled from Sam's cigar to the rug. He said, *"Damn!"* and scrubbed it into the nap. I squinted at him dazedly. "Sam!" I said. "Are you crazy? Are you telling me you met a *Centaur?"*

"Centaur!" said Sam. *"That's* the word. I tried to remember it for weeks, but all I could think of was *'senator.'* . . . An' this guy was a front of a horse, too. Yep, a Centaur. That's what Nestros was."

"B-but," I protested, "centaurs were fabulous monsters who lived in ancient Greece! They don't really exist!"

"This one did," said Sam.

"Nonsense! They were wild woodland creatures, sly and treacherous, given to drink and mad orgies—"

"You're tellin' *me!"* said Sam.

COURSE I don't blame you (he continued) for not believin' me. It's a cockeyed set-up, I know. But there it is. An' I can prove it, too—I hope.

Naturally, the first thing I done was to holler for Dumbo. He came shufflin' in from the Princess' stall, an' ast me questions with his eyebrows.

I said: "Dumbo, am I in my right mind, or have I got delirious tantrums? Do you see what I see in there—a horse with a man's head?"

"Where?" ast Dumbo, an' looked at Nestros. Then he shrugged. "Oh, you mean *him?* Gosh, you had me excited for a minute. A horse with a man's head—"

"Well, aint that what he is?"

"Shucks, no!" said Dumbo. "He aint nothin' only a man with a horse's body. I better go now. I got to rub down the Princess."

Nestros leered at him. "Give her my love, bud," he said.

Dumbo scowled. "Never mind that! You just let the Princess alone, that's all. The next time I catch you tryin' to kick down the p'tition between your stalls—"

"Aw, don't be such an old grouch!" said the Centaur sulkily. "It's no skin off your nose if me an' Her Nibs want to fling a little whoa."

"It'll be skin off your hide," said Dumbo grimly.

Nestros snorted. "Great Zeus! You think she wants to be a filly all her life?"

"As far as you're concerned," said Dumbo, "yes! Or you'll be a filly-mignon."

I stared at him. "For gosh sakes, Dumbo," I busted in, "how can you be so calm? Don't you realize we're lookin' at a real, live centaur?"

"I don't care," he sniffed, "if he's an All-America halfback. I'll comb his mane with a cobble if he don't leave the Princess be."

An' he stomped away. Nestros said glumly: "There's a kill-joy for you! For two drachmas, I'd kick his ears off!"

"What's the matter?" I ast. "What do you want with the Princess, anyway?"

He grinned. "What do *you* think?"

"If it's companionship," I said, "there's six other horses in this paddock—"

"It's a moot question," said Nestros. "Sex of one, an' half a dozen of the other. Oh, well—this aint gettin' us nowhere. The question is, when do I start to see a little action around here?"

"Action?" I repeated.

"Don't be a dope!" snorted Nestros. "This here's a racetrack, aint it?"

"W-why, sure. Of course."

"Well, when do I make with the hoofs? I'm gettin' tired of standin' around here like a stuffed owl."

"You mean you want to *race?"*

"Why not?" he demanded. "For three weeks Akers has been stallin' me; if you do the same, I'm signin' myself up a new boss. So what do you say, chum? Do I run or don't I?"

"What I want to know," I countered, "is can you run or can't you?"

"Can I run!" he snorted. "Can I *run?* Listen, pal, I'm the fastest thing on four legs you ever saw. Why, I gave the Minotaur a ten-mile start an' beat him from East Phrygia to Peiraeus by the Marathon route. I'm Greece lightning. I run faster than a lisle stocking. Ever hear of the 'Trudgin' Horse?' I'm the one who made him look slow. I can outrace, outdrink an' outsmart any equine you ever heard of!"

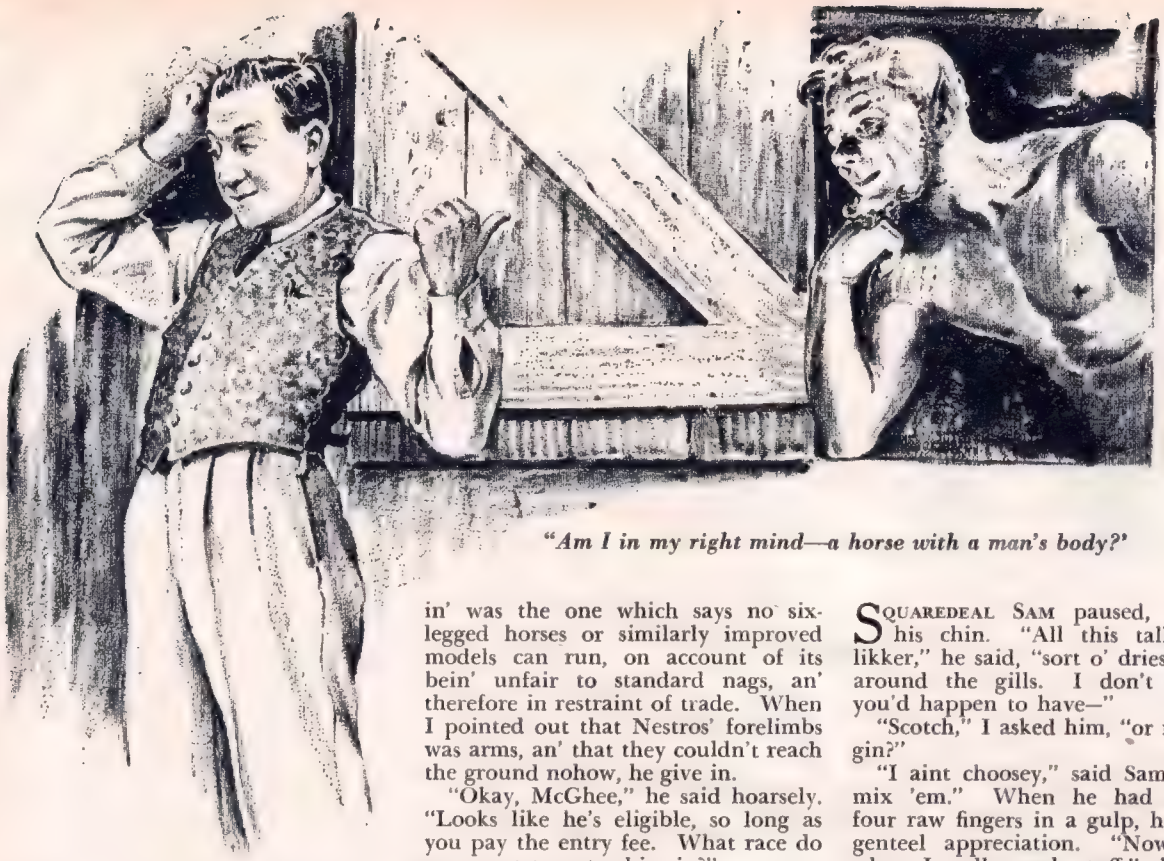
"An' outbrag," I added, "any I ever heard, period. But okay. If the Commission'll stand for it, I'll play ball. Let's go see the racetrack papas."



An' I took him over to the track office.

Well, what his appearance done to them Florida lads was a caution! He threw them crackers into bedlam. The Head Steward, guy named McClannaghan, took one look at Nestros an' keeled over in a dead faint. The Wet an' Dry platforms split even on the deal: two onlookers signed the pledge, an' another two hit the corn like a hobnailed boot in a crowd.

There'd been eight guys—managers, track officials an' so forth—at the office when me an' Nestros appeared. A minute later there was only two left, the Track Commissioner an' a guy that you've prob'ly heard of—"Thick Nick" Pappalousas, owner-manager of the Vulcan stables an' the shrewdest tinhorn gambler which ever fumbled a form-sheet. The Chief was still with us because his piggies was *peet*rified; Nick was still on deck because his sense of direction was bad. He'd mistook an open closet for the THIS WAY OUT.



"Am I in my right mind—a horse with a man's body?"

Nestros helped me lift Harkrader, the Commissioner, down offen the chandelier. He looked sort of scornful of the human race, which I don't much blame him. After Pappalousas' teeth stopped chatterin', I told the Chief what I wanted.

His eyes bugged out of his head.

"What!" he managed. "You want to enter *th-that*—I mean *him*—I mean *that*—in a race?"

"Why not?" I ast him.

"B-but he's not a horse!" said the Commissioner.

"No?" I said. "Then what is he?"

"Why, he's a—a human," said the Chief. "I think. Or, no . . . wait a minute! He's a—"

"He's a myth," broke in Thick Nick. "A myth out of the folklore of my homeland. That's what he is."

"Well, a myth," I told them, "is as good as a miler—especially when he's got four legs, like this one. I want to enter him in a race, an' I mean to. I been studyin' races since I was knee-high to a jockey, an' there's nothin' in the rules against it."

I had him there. The Commissioner leafed through a collection o' rule-books as bulky as an O.P.A. study on paper-conservation, an' he couldn't find no law against me enterin' Nestros in a horse-race. The only ruling which come anywhere close to applyin' was the one which says no six-legged horses or similarly improved models can run, on account of its bein' unfair to standard nags, an' therefore in restraint of trade. When I pointed out that Nestros' forelimbs was arms, an' that they couldn't reach the ground nohow, he give in.

"Okay, McGhee," he said hoarsely. "Looks like he's eligible, so long as you pay the entry fee. What race do you want to enter him in?"

"If he's as good as he says he is," I said, "plenty of 'em. But for a starter, I'd like to run him in the Silver Stakes tomorrow."

Thick Nick started.

"Huh!" he said. "What's that? The Silver Stakes?"

"What's the matter?" I grinned at him. "You scared because you had that one figgered in the bag for your colors? Well, you might as well scratch Printer's Ink now, Nick. The race is as good as won. How about it, Nestros?"

Nestros leered up from the divan he was settin' on. "You said it, chum. I aint goin' to show them punks nothin' but heels. Hey—what's that?" His eyes had suddenly lit on a decanter on the Chief's desk; he rose an' sniffed it eagerly. "Well, bless my withers, if it aint four-star ambrosia!"

"Look—" I said.

"I aint had a snort of this," said Nestros, "since I left the Old Country. How about it, Chief?"

He stared at the Commissioner hopefully, but I took the bottle away from him.

"Oh, no, you don't!" I said sternly. "Tomorrow I'll buy you all you want, but right now you're in trainin'. Come on, now. We got places to go an' things to do. See you guys later."

An' we left.

SQUAREDEAL SAM paused, rubbing his chin. "All this talk about likker," he said, "sort o' dries me out around the gills. I don't suppose you'd happen to have—"

"Scotch," I asked him, "or rye? Or gin?"

"I aint choosey," said Sam. "Just mix 'em." When he had finished four raw fingers in a gulp, he sighed genteel appreciation. "Now, that's what I call good stuff," he said. "Eighteen months old, if it's a day. It aint often you taste that aged-in-the-wood stock any more. Ambrosia—that's what it is. Necktie an' ambrosia, like Nestros was always talkin' about."

"What—and—ambrosia?" I asked him.

"Necktie. He was a sort of a poetical guy, Nestros was. 'I aint much on music,' he used to say, 'but firewater an' fillies is my dish. Give me the Princess an' a moonlight night, an' we'll sup necktie an' ambrosia together—'"

"Nectar," I said. "You mean nectar!"

Sam sighed again, sadly. "I'll say he did!" he declared. "But I was just gettin' around to that—"

WELL (Sam said), what happened was my own darn' fault. I ought to of knew better than leave that centaur out o' my sight with the big race comin' up the next day. But of course I had preparations to make, like slippin' a few of the rival jockeys a few bucks an' bettin' a few centuries with my bookie pals before word got around how fast Nestros was. An' so I turned the centaur over to Dumbo for safekeepin'.

"Rub him down good," I said. "Give him his supper, an' see that he



gets a good night's sleep tonight. Get it?"

"Yessir," said Dumbo. "What'll I do, Mr. McGhee—pour ice-water on him?"

"Ice-water!" I yelled. "Are you off your button?"

"You said he was to get a good nice sleet tonight," said Dumbo.

"*Night's sleep,* you nitwit!" I told him. "Not *nice sleet!* He's runnin' in the Silver Stakes tomorrow. He's got to be in tip-top condition. I'll see you in the mornin'."

"Yessir," said Dumbo.

"So long, pal," said Nestros. "Bet your shirt."

Dumbo led him away. The last I seen of them, Nestros was hummin' *"I'll See You in My Dreams"* as Dumbo led him past Princess Sally's stall, with a good grip on the halter.

The next mornin' I got to the paddock early. An' a good thing, too. I arrove in the nick o' time, just as Dumbo come bustin' out o' the enclosure like a whirlwind with ears. He bumped into me, an' I grabbed him.

"Hey!" I yelled. "What's the matter?"

"Lemme go!" he howled. "Gimme a gun—a knife—an ax! Let me at him!"

"Who?" I demanded, shakin' him. "What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" he sobbed. "Nothin' except that that darn' centaur got into the Princess' stall last night. Wait till I get my hands on him, the lowdown—"

"Take it easy!" I soothed him. "You must be wrong. Everything seems to be okay. Come on, let's have a look."

But it was me that was mistook, not him. We walked over to Nestros' stall, an the closer we got, the stronger we smelled the aroma of alcohol. I flang open the top door, an' there sprawled the centaur, tight as a starlet's sweater, one mitt clenchin' an empty bottle. Half asleep, in a triumphant mumble he was croonin', *"Oh, the ol' gray mare, she ain' what she used to be—"*

"I'll murder him!" bawled Dumbo. "I'll chop him up into point rations—"

"You'll do nothin' of the sort!" I told him. "This drunken sot may be a heel without a soul, but he's our chance to get rich. I've bet every cent I own an' a few I don't own, on his winnin' today. How did this happen, anyway? How come he got out of his stall?"

"How should I know?" ast Dumbo.

"Well, you was here, wasn't you?"

"Not atter you sent word I was to go home."

I stared at him. "Me? I sent word? Who said so?"

"Thick Nick. He come down about twelve o'clock an' told me you said I was to go home an' sleep—"

"Thick Nick!" I repeated, understandin' everything now. "That dirty crook! He knew Nestros would run the pants offen his Printer's Ink, so he framed this. Well, we'll learn him! Come on! We got to get Nestros sobered up so he can run!"

WELL, we done it. Don't ast me how. We worked out on that refugee from a sideshow with Epsom salts an' ice-water an' steam-baths till he was seepin' alky like a still.

By ten o'clock we had him standin' up without help; by noon he could walk a reasonably straight line; an' by two-thirty he was feelin' good enough to trot around the paddock. He had a terrific hangover, o' course, but that was to be expected. He was meeker than I ever seen him.

"I'm sorry, McGhee," he said. "I only meant to get a little edge on. But it's been so long since I had a snootful—" He shook his head ruefully. "Who was that guy gave me the ambrosia?" he ast.

"Thick Nick, the Greek," I told him. "He's entered a horse in the Stakes, too. He wants you out of it."

He nodded. "I might have knew there was a catch in it," he said. "Timmy O'Daniels, doughnuts forever—"

"Excuse me a minute, Sam," I interrupted. "Are you sure that's what he said?"

"Well, somethin' like that," said Sam.

"Are you sure he didn't say: *'Timeo Danaos et donæ ferentes'?"* I asked. "That means, *'Beware the Greeks bearing gifts.'"*

"Could be," said Sam. . . .

Well, anyhow (continued Sam), the Silver Stakes was scheduled fourth on the ticket—around four-thirty that would be. One thing I'll say for Nestros: he had good recup'rative powers. By four o'clock he was fit as a fiddle an' ready for anything. I sent Dumbo on up to the tack-room to get dressed in his silks—he was our jockey, you know—while I saddled Nestros an' give him last-minute instructions.

I was just tightenin' the final cinch when into the paddock come Commissioner Harkrader an' Thick Nick. Nick was grinnin' like a cat in a creamery, but his smirk curdled when he seen Nestros. The Commissioner looked puzzled too.

He said, "I—er—there seems to be some misunderstanding, McGhee. Nick led me to believe you were scratching your entry."

"Unless he develops hives between now an' the post-time," I said, "Nick's wrong. Nestros is runnin', Chief."

Nick moaned, "I—I don't understand it! He was as stiff as a boiled shirt—"

Nestros chuckled. "A mere truffle, chum," he said. "Drop around tonight, an' we'll split another keg—on me, this time."

Harkrader turned to Nick. "Well, Pappalousas—you were wrong. Apparently this—er—horse is quite capable of running, and eligible too. I'm afraid there is nothing more we can do to stop him."

"No," said Thick Nick. "I guess not—" He paused suddenly, his eyes lightin' on Nestros' hoofs. "Hey! Wait a minute!" he yelled. "There *is* somethin' else! This horse *is* ineligible!"



"I'll murder him!" bawled Dumbo.

"Why?" demanded me an Harkrader together.

"Because," pointed Nick, "he aint shod! Accordin' to the rules of horse-racin', no horse can enter a race which aint properly equipped with horse-shoes! He aint got none!"

I TOOK a quick look. The Greek was right. Nestros didn't have nothin' on his pedals but grass-stains.

I groaned. Nestros looked puzzled. "Horseshoes, chum?" he said. "How long does it take to get them?"

"Too long," I told him. "There's a blacksmith here on the track, but it would take him a half-hour, at least, to shoe you. An' the race starts in less than thirty minutes."

"Half an hour," said Nestros thoughtfully. "That's not so bad. I think I can fix it. They delay the race if it rains, don't they?"

"Yes," I told him. "Long enough to see if it's goin' to clear up again or not. Why?"

"Why, because," said the centaur, "I think I'll let it rain a little." He lifted his head an' started whisperin' something in foreign words. The sky, which had been as clear as a crystal ball, all of a sudden started gatherin' wisps of cloud. They got thicker an' heavier an' darker by the minute—an' before you could raise an umbrella, down come the rain in a regular cloudburst!

Nick howled like a kicked pup, tossed one horrified look at Nestros, an' ran. Harkrader lit out too. You see, what Thick Nick had forgot to take into consideration was the fact that centaurs, in addition to bein' legendary creatures, is also—demi-gods!

In a tight spot, Nestros had turned on a miracle!

But there wasn't no time to waste. I grabbed aholt of Dumbo, who had just returned from the tack-room.

"Quick, kid!" I yelled. "We've got a thirty-minute lease on life, liberty, an' the pursuit of filthy lucre. Not a minute to waste. Hurry Nestros down to the smithy an' have him shod!"

"Huh?" said Dumbo, gawkin'. "You mean it?"

"Of course I mean it! Get goin'!"

"Sure, Mr. McGhee!" he said. "Yessir! Right away, Mr. McGhee!" he said. An' he grabbed Nestros' reins, an' off they went.

I should of knew right then. I should of seen that he was too anxious, too willin' to help. But I was too eager to get goin', too wrapped up in my own thoughts. . . .

First hint I had that anything was wrong came a few minutes later when I heard somethin' like an auto backfirin'. The minute it sounded, the rain stopped. I was just thinkin' to myself how funny this was, when Dumbo appeared, exposin' a mouthful of molars in a grin that stretched from the nape of his neck to his tonsils. He was carryin' Nestros' saddle an' gear. I stared at him.

"What are you doin' back here?" I demanded.

He nodded happily. "It's done, Mr. McGhee. I done it myself."

"Already?" I gasped. "You mean to tell me you shod a horse in less than five minutes? Dumbo—"

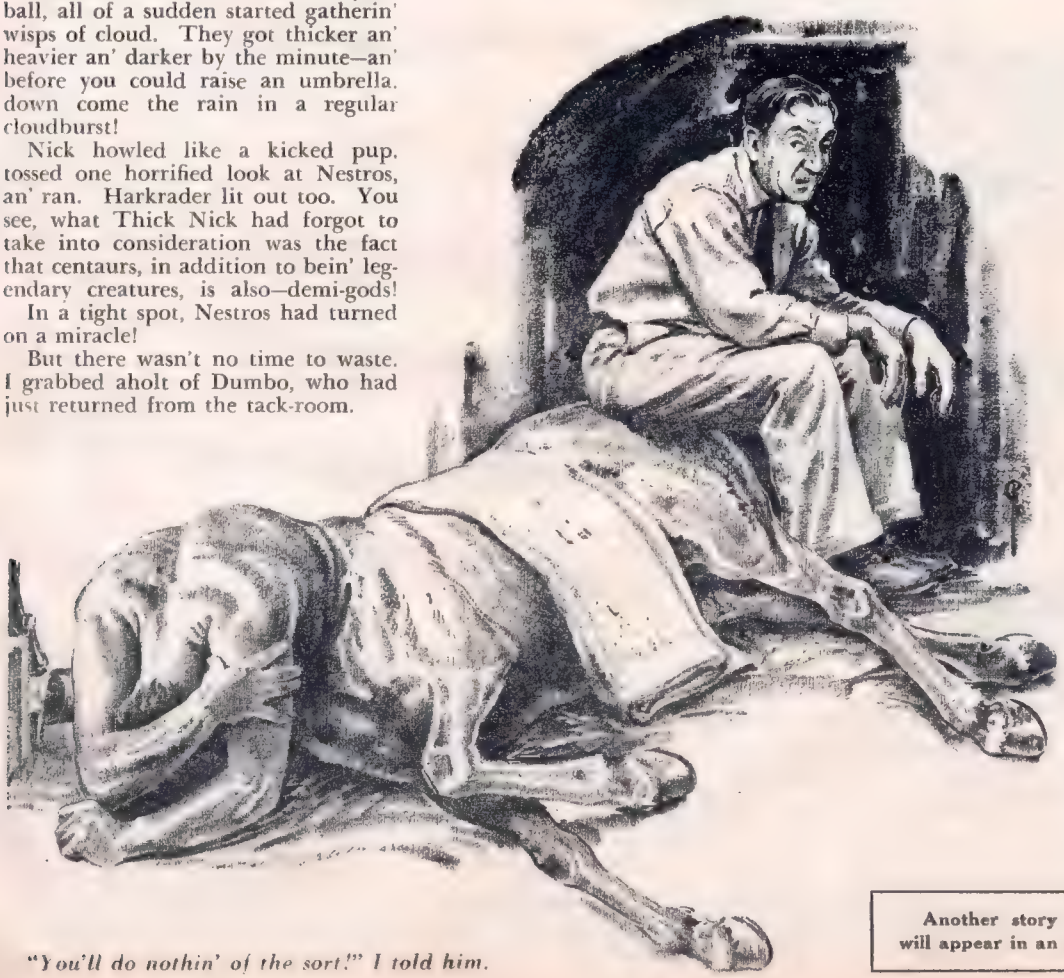
His jaw dropped. "*Shod!*" he said. "*Sh-shod!* Gee, Mr. McGhee—I thought you said to take him away an' have him *shot!*"

"So," said Squaredeal Sam, "that's all. I told you I'd bet everything I had on Nestros. I maybe forgot to say I also bet everything Akers owned. Which is why his stables is bein' auctioned off next Sattiday."

I stared at him dubiously.

"This has all been most entertaining, Sam," I said, "but it still doesn't explain why you want three hundred dollars. An investment, you said—"

"That's right," nodded Sam. "I got to buy Princess Sally at that auction. I may be wrong—but from what I know about centaurs, it looks to me like there's still a chance to hit the jackpot. Like the fellow says, 'There's no foal like an young foal.'"



"You'll do nothin' of the sort!" I told him.

Another story by Nelson Bond will appear in an early issue.

Treasure

A story of 1943 prospectors,



Illustrated by Charles Hargens

IN the lead, ambling toward Denver there came the gray-bearded stumpy Mr. Samuel Hightower, prospector and miner and next came his partner, the dun-mustached lank Mr. William Strayhorn, leading the burro Prar'ee, loaded with bedrolls, a skillet, coffee-pot, Dutch oven and a miscellany of picks, singlejacks, shovels, and drills.

Prar'ee, whose left hip wore a LJG brand, and who had only recently replaced a jalopy disabled by a cracked engine-block, had been presented to the men by a farmer.

"Help yourself to her," the farmer had offered hospitably. "All I know is, a few weeks ago I found her out on the prairie." So they called her "Prar'ee."

Mr. Hightower and Mr. Strayhorn were passing through Denver merely because the city was the shortest line to some cinnabar claims they had on Kibosh Creek. Walking with the short rapid steps of mountaineers, the two men kept their squint-eyed gaze fixed on the mountains, ignoring the adjacent scenery—which had no interest for them, being cluttered with sugar-beets, corn and wheat. Even when the open fields gave way to Denver, they still kept their eyes on the mountains, ignoring the traffic whirling past.

That some of the cars were carrying soldiers did not surprise Messrs. Hightower and Strayhorn; miners always know when there is a war, because it is during wars that Governments suddenly discover a dire need for tungsten, chrome, magnesium, molybdenum and similar metals all of which are scorned by the same Government in peacetime. A jeep slowed as it passed, and a grinning corporal began to sing "Clementine." Six soldiers stared from the rear of a truck and waved.

"Hey, Gran'-pappies!" one of them shouted. "Thar's gold in them thar hills!"

Mr. Hightower was stirred to a sour comment: "The soldiers in this war haint a mite smarter'n the ones in the one afore this'n."

Residence streets turned to semi-business streets, but the pair plodded on indifferently. Cities like Denver doubtless serve some purpose, but they had no time to waste in discovering why. Prar'ee, by the quickened tempo of her shifting enormous ears, was the only one of the trio to show an interest in city sights. Twice she tugged hard on her lead-rope.

As the trio passed a steam-cleaning plant, a projecting iron pipe suddenly let out a loud hissing; Prar'ee promptly jerked the rope from Mr. Hightower and clattered at a lope into the alley.

A rumbling truck sent the two miners leaping toward the far curb, swearing vigorously. Then with Mr. Strayhorn limping from an old fall down a rotten shaft ladder and Mr. Hightower

Beyond Gold

by RAY NAFZIGER

trotting rheumatically as if he wore hobbles, they followed the burro. The alley presented high brick walls enclosing the backyards of huge red brick mansions, relics of the golden-silver age of Colorado's mining millionaires.

No burro was in sight; Prar'ee had simply vanished.

"Must of fell down some prospect-hole," muttered Mr. Hightower as they went along the paved alley, which presented difficulties even to burro-trackers of sixty years' experience. However, in some soil washed over the pavement they saw one dainty hoof-print, beside a brick wall at least twelve feet high. A solid wooden door in the wall was slightly ajar, and Mr. Hightower peered in cautiously.

Prar'ee was in the back yard, eagerly cropping uncut grass as if it were burro manna. Beyond was the rear of a decrepit brick mansion, ornamented with turrets, towers and crenelated walls. In one corner of the yard sat an ancient truck with the faded letters "LJG" painted on its door. Near by was a blacksmith's forge, a sheaf of rusty miners' drills and a pick. On the handle of the pick had been burned "LJG."

"Same as Prar'ee's brand," observed Mr. Hightower. "Comes to me Lucky John Gubbins used to burn all his tools with his initials, he was so cussed suspicious of bein' stole from."

"So he did," agreed Mr. Strayhorn. "Wonder whatever happened to Lucky John?"

THE back porch door popped open and a dried-up baldish man came down the rickety steps. Behind him, shapeless in a flannel dressing-gown, was a dumpy-figured woman with stringy gray hair and a fat round face.

"It's Durango, come home ag'in," squeaked the baldish one, staring through silver spectacles. "You Durango, you're a bad girl! Runnin' off from your home and your poppa and momma! Where you been, hey, Durango, and where'd you git that pack?"

He walked toward the burro, keeping up an affectionate scolding. The dumpy woman followed, making cooing sounds as if Prar'ee were a long-lost child.

Promptly Mr. Hightower and Mr. Strayhorn stepped into the yard. "You, John Gubbins," observed Mr. Hightower, "if that's your burro, you owe us a bill for the shocks o' oats we been stealin' for her all the way to Denver."

"*Lucky* John Gubbins, I'll have you know!" the man returned irritably, glaring hard at the two. "Borned with a four-leaf clover birthmark! What did you do with that shovel you borried from me at Silver Plume, Sam Hightower?"

"It busted," said Mr. Hightower. "You shore got a memory like a mule—that was thirty years ago I borried that shovel!"

Mr. Gubbins had turned his glare on Mr. Strayhorn, as if trying to remember what *he* had borrowed and not returned.

"I place you now: Had the claim next to me at Alma, forty-three year ago. That was the year afore I made the big strike on Columbine Creek and me and Flossie here got married and I built her this here house."



Mr. Hightower and Mr. Strayhorn stared in astonishment at the woman.

"Is that Flossie?" demanded Mr. Strayhorn unbelievingly and tactlessly. "I seen her dance down in Cripple Crick. This cain't be *her!*"

The woman only smiled good-humoredly. "I don't wonder you're surprised. I put on forty pounds and a'most forty-five years since Cripple Creek."

"I'm here to say she's purtier now than she was in Cripple Creek," stated Lucky John Gubbins hostilely. "Gits purtier every year, Flossie does—more of her every year to git purtier!"

HER pudgy hand on Lucky John's shoulder, Flossie smiled at him fondly, her face tender and happy, and the light in her eyes assaying prettier than that from a quartz vein streaked with free gold.

"Luckiest thing I ever done was to get her to marry me," stated Mr. Gubbins. "Folks said Flossie would quit me soon as the money from my mine was done. But she didn't leave me; she's stayed through good times and bad."

"Never been any bad times with you, John," Flossie said softly.

"Folks think I'm busted now," went on Lucky John. "A lot they know about it! Nobody knows how much I've got, 'ceptin' me and Flossie—and even Flossie don't realize all we got. Women is poor at figures. Even at the old price of twenty dollars and sixty-seven cents a ounce, it would figure up to— And at thirty-five dollars, why, it's more millions than Haw Tabor was ever said to have."

"Now, John," Flossie said hurriedly, "don't go bragging. You ought to keep it a secret, like you been doing all these years."



"It's all right," he said patting her hand. "These boys is old-timers. Real old-timers, and they wouldn't breathe a word. I'm goin' to show it to 'em. Come in," he commanded, waving at the back door. "I want to show you just how lucky I been."

Beyond the porch was an enormous bare-floored kitchen, empty except for a tiny rusted four-hole range in a corner, the kind found in prospectors' cabins. On the stove was an old coffee-pot and a black iron kettle containing beans; on a table was a half-empty pan of biscuits and a little jug of syrup.

Lucky John Gubbins chuckled. "It's the biggest joke: Here we are eatin' beans and a few biscuits. Sold off all our furniture, and livin' here in this big empty house, right over— You wait till I show you what we're livin' over."

LIGHTING a kerosene lantern, he clumped down a hall and through a door down a flight of stairs. After him went Mr. Strayhorn, Mr. Hightower and Flossie.

Flossie, however, went only as far as the head of the stairs.

"Don't let him suspect," she murmured to Mr. Hightower. "Please don't let on what John's got—it would disturb him. Let him think it's what he tells you it is; he's a little out of his head about it. Please don't let on."

"Trust us, ma'am," Mr. Hightower whispered back, and descended into a low-ceiled cavern with several huge rooms. In one sat an old furnace and near it an empty coalroom, scraped painfully clean.

Behind a padlocked door which Lucky John opened with a key was a small room lighted by a single dirty window. Bending his creaky bones, Lucky John scraped away some straw and sacks, revealing the ring to a trapdoor some four feet square. The lantern showed a shaftlike hole, neatly cribbed and fitted with a ladder.

Lucky John chuckled. "Time I dug this hole, I had a 'lectric hoist rigged up to take out the dirt and rock. Looks like a reg'lar mine, don't it? Kin you imagine it, right here under Denver?"

The three slithered down the ladder with the easy sureness of sixty years of ladder-descending, sniffing the damp earthy odors with the delight of men glad to escape the enervating wholesomeness of sun-washed air. Twenty feet of ladder brought them to the bottom of the shaft, off which led a tunnel six feet square and perhaps twenty feet long. In the tunnel, tiers of plank shelves had been built up on brick supports.

"And they think I'm poor," tittered Lucky John. "They think I'm just another busted Colorady mining-king. Jist take a look!"

Messrs. Strayhorn and Hightower craned their necks eagerly. In the dim lantern-light, they saw stacked on the shelves rusty-looking little bars, a little wider at the bottom than at the top, each perhaps eighteen inches long. They looked like sections cut from the small rails of a narrow-gauge railway.

"From that mine I had up near Nederland," said Mr. Gubbins. "The 'Flossie Wonder,' I called it. I know the Gover'ment called in all the gold awhile back, but Flossie had a spell of sickness at the time and I was busy takin' care of her. Afterward her and me got the idea of turnin' it in when we're gone. It's here safe—just as good as if it was buried in Kentucky with all that other Gover'ment gold."

Mr. Strayhorn opened his mouth. "Gold!" he said, astonished, and would have said more if Mr. Hightower had not punched him in the ribs.

"I had the smelter put it in bars like rails an' I painted 'em to look jist like rusty old rails, to keep anybody from stealin' 'em. I got smart after bein' stole from all my life! Trucked 'em down here and th'owed 'em in the back yard, like they was old iron to take down here. An' here it is—tons o' gold. Seventy tons or a little better, and ninety-seven per cent pure. I guess the Gover'ment will shore be glad to git it after Flossie and me has gone. Allus hard times after a war ends, and the country'll need all the gold it kin git; and Lucky John's will be here for it, lookin' jist like railroad iron."

"It shore does that," said Mr. Strayhorn with heavy sarcasm. "Looks jist like railroad iron."

Mr. Hightower, after jabbing his partner in the ribs again, started to pick up one of the bars to heft it. Astonished at having to use two hands to lift it, he knelt, took out a jackknife, and used the blade to scratch at the end of the bar, digging through the rusty paint.

"FLOSSIE and me got no children or close relations," continued Mr. Gubbins. "So we want to give it all to the Gover'ment. I only wish," he went on regretfully, "we'd git to see it in the papers after we're gone: '*Old Mining Pioneer and His Wife Leaves Seventy Millions in Gold to His Country*'—that's what they'll have."

Mr. Hightower studied the scratch critically. "What's the idea of givin' it away?" he asked.

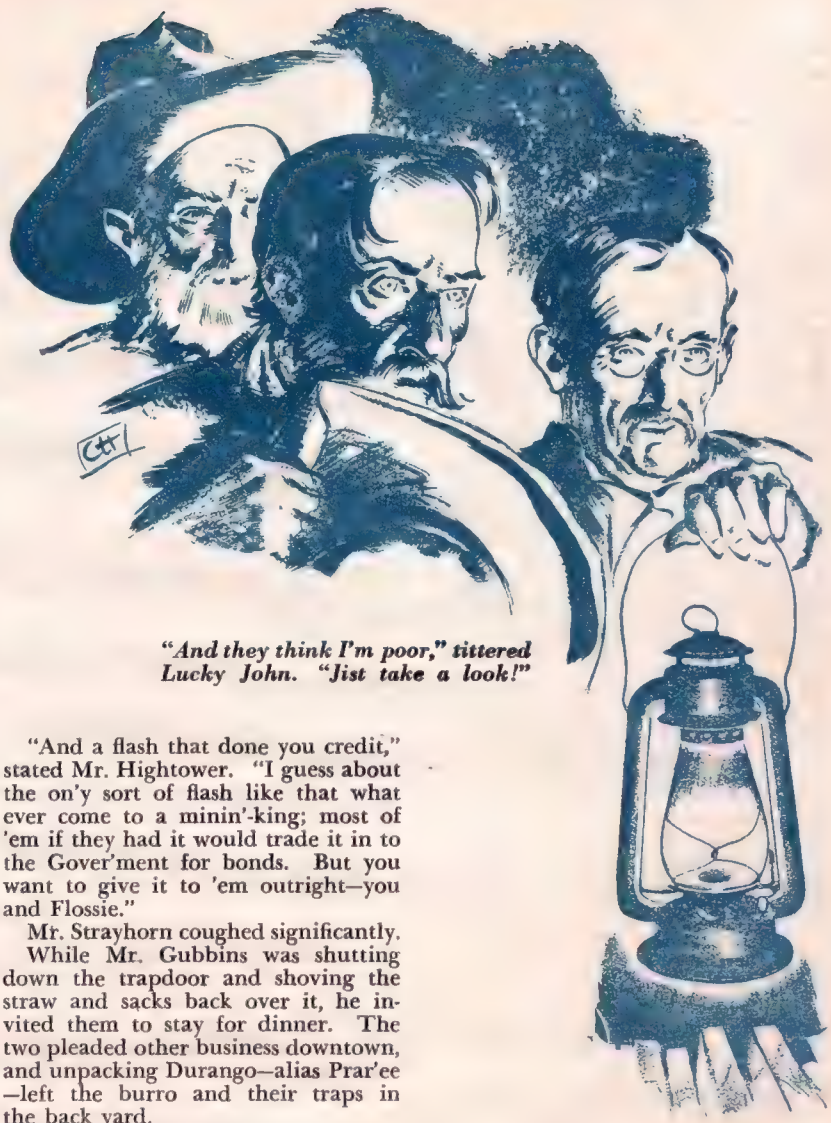
"Why, to show ever'body," replied Mr. Gubbins impatiently, "how I appreciated the luck I had livin' in a country like this, where me and Flossie has been as happy as we been. It jist come to me that as a young man,

I never had no chance to fight for my country, but jist spent money like water on foolishness like the others what struck it lucky minin'. I want to make some return for bein' so lucky as to live in this here U. S. A."

Mr. Hightower nodded. "It's a notion that does you credit, Lucky John. Seventy tons of this, did you say? And ninety-seven per cent pure?" He walked along the shelves, hefting bars on the various shelves. "And you got it from your Flossie Wonder mine up near Nederland?" He considered it a moment. "I think you got the wrong idee on this, Lucky John. The Gover'ment needs this gold now. They need it to feed soldiers, to buy guns and ships. They're willin' to pay you for it. And if you sold it to 'em now, you and Flossie could live a mite more comfortable-like."

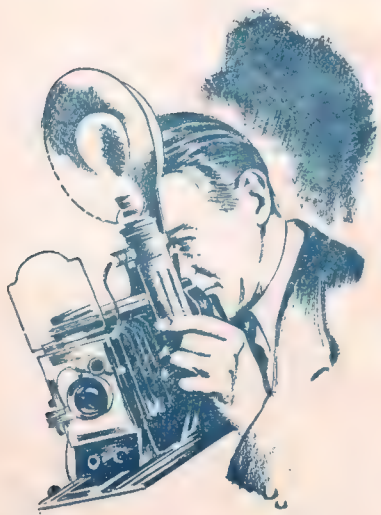
"No," said Mr. Gubbins. "I don't want to sell it; I want it to be a gift. Flossie and me, we'll git along. We want it all to go to the country—at one whack."

"Then," said Mr. Hightower, "why not give it while you're still alive, and while the country needs it worst? I reckon if the President would say to you he needed it, you'd give it?"



"And they think I'm poor," tittered Lucky John. "Jist take a look!"

MR. GUBBINS waved his hand. "Any time the President says he needs anything from me, he kin have it. I didn't know the country was so hard up now. Sure, it kin have it; this here gold come from this country, and I want it to go back to the country. Because I had a chance to live happy, gopherin' around in these here Rocky Mountains, livin' free and easy as the air. It come to me one day—all what I owe the Gover'ment for a happy life like me and Flossie lived. It come in a flash."



"And a flash that done you credit," stated Mr. Hightower. "I guess about the on'y sort of flash like that what ever come to a minin'-king; most of 'em if they had it would trade it in to the Gover'ment for bonds. But you want to give it to 'em outright—you and Flossie."

Mr. Strayhorn coughed significantly.

While Mr. Gubbins was shutting down the trapdoor and shoving the straw and sacks back over it, he invited them to stay for dinner. The two pleaded other business downtown, and unpacking Durango—alias Prar'ee—left the burro and their traps in the back yard.

"Plumb tetched in the head, pore John," remarked Mr. Strayhorn sadly, as he and his partner headed down Sixteenth Street. "But it was cruel of you to git his anticipations up about the President askin' him to give that junk over the Gover'ment. You could of said it was gold all right—no harm thar. Anybody could see with just one look it's jist what it looks like: rails off a old narrer-gauge railway."

"So they could," said Mr. Hightower. "Anybody—but in special a short-sighted high-grader like you, with no speerit of curiousness. Now shet up and le's make tracks."

IN silence they clumped down Seventeenth Street and into a bank, brushing past the secretary of one of the officials. In a private office sat a graying man.

"Social call or business?" he asked, after he had shaken the gnarled hands of the two.

"Business," admitted Samuel Hightower.

The official frowned. "Then get out of here!" he ordered briskly. "I got no more grub-stake money to throw after what I've already given you two. I'm buying bonds these days. I don't care what you got. No, I say—no!"

"Taint us that's got this," said Mr. Hightower. "And it's a'ready dug up and smelted into bars. Seventy tons of it, almost pure. Stacked up under a cellar right here in Denver. Lucky John Gubbins has got it, and he thinks it's gold."

"Yeah," chuckled Mr. Strayhorn through his drooping mustaches.

"The pore locoed fool claims he made it look like old rails off a railway so's people wouldn't try to steal it. Lucky John allus was suspectin' folks of tryin' to swipe his property."

"Aw, shut up," growled Mr. Hightower, and leaned over to talk to the official in tones too confidential for Mr. Strayhorn's large ears. Mr. Strayhorn, not even bothering to try to listen, stoked a pipe so foul that the secretary in the outer officer, holding a handkerchief over her nose, hurried out to lunch.

"Seventy tons," Mr. Hightower repeated as he got up. "As a present to the country You didn't believe it, but I'll take up any expert you pick to look at it. And this here gift ort to be accepted with style. I think the President ort to ask him nice over the telephone and there ort to be a big fuss made over it—with a brass band and mebbe-so a guard of soldiers. And a big piece in the paper; but printed to show it as gold. Lucky John never did think nothin' hardly worth while diggin' 'less'n it was gold, and his mind is a little gone now."

"All that can be done," promised the banker, "if you're right about this. It can all be made very impressive."

"It ort to be, if Denver has got any heart," said Mr. Hightower.

"Seventy million dollars!" murmured the official. "Wanting to give it as a present to the country, because he dug it up out of the country! Even if he only thinks it's gold, that's a lot of money to think you're givin' your country."

"Him and Flossie are givin' it," reminded Mr. Hightower. "He'd want Flossie in on it too."

IT was two days later that the usual graveyard quiet of the street before the Gubbins mansion was broken by a mingling of activities similar to those observed on military parade-grounds, a busy road near a front line and a circus lot. Three uniformed bands marched in to take stations on the spacious Gubbins lawn, where they took turns playing stirring marches. Crowds of people milled behind soldiers drawn up in close ranks extending along the block. Jeeps and motorcycles dashed in and out on mysterious errands. Trucks came, bringing more soldiers. Finally a fleet of Army trucks arrived, backed to the curb, and unloaded soldiers who marched into the Gubbins basement, taking with them small hand-trucks.

Finally came half a dozen huge limousines and military cars, to unload dignitaries—high Army officers, the Governor, and assorted Senators and Congressmen. Lucky John Gubbins in a new top hat and new black suit, and Mrs. Lucky John in a new dress and hat, received these callers on their front porch, and the bands played the national anthem

Then the soldiers appeared from the basement with the hand-trucks loaded with strange-looking bars looking exactly like short lengths of narrow-gauge rails. Lucky John made a short speech and several of the visitors made somewhat longer ones. Then while the soldiers steadily loaded the rails into the waiting trucks, photographers in droves took shots of Lucky John and Flossie and their callers, of Mrs. Lucky John waving a big flag, of Lucky John demonstrating with a pick, of Lucky John with Durango loaded with miners' tools and a camp outfit—hundreds of flashes of Lucky John; who thought that he was giving his country seventy million dollars and some odd cents at the personal request of the President who from the White House had engaged in a sprightly ten minutes' long-distance talk with the Gubbinses.

The gaping crowds tried to press closer for a look at the strange cargo being loaded into the trucks. The words "seventy million" flew from mouth to mouth, being shortly inflated to seven hundred millions, to seven billions. By the time the distinguished visitors began to depart, the report was accepted that Lucky John was contributing enough gold to pay the national debt and the cost of the war in addition.

When quiet succeeded, and the street was clear, other trucks rumbled in, producing an activity only a little less than that of the morning. Instead of soldiers, workmen now arrived—crews which began to replace the leaky roofs, as a compliment of Denver roofing concerns. Other men worked on the tumbling chimneys and swung from scaffoldings to paint the exterior woodwork.

Inside, other crews cleaned and redecorated walls, floors, ceilings. In the basement still other men were installing a stoker for the furnace, while tons of coal were rattling down chutes to fill the empty coalroom. In the evening trucks arrived to unload rugs and furniture to be placed in the rooms when the redecorating was finished. In the pantry and storerooms, cases of canned goods were being stacked, and if a few cases of various liquids were included, certainly Lucky John Gubbins deserved those too. A new range and sink were set up in the kitchen—compliments of still other Denver concerns.

It was not for nothing that the bank official had been on the phone for two days and a half of two nights, asking what Denver ought to do for a locoed old coot who had planned to leave seventy million dollars in gold to his country.

The Denver newspapers each got out special editions, with a few copies specially printed for Lucky John's reading, headlining the Gubbins' gift of "$70,000,000 in gold," followed by whole pages of the history of Lucky John and Flossie Gubbins, with pictures of Flossie during her dancing career, and listing the various mines discovered by Lucky John.

NEXT day, while the clatter of workmen still sounded inside and outside the house, Messrs. Hightower and Strayhorn were ready to depart from the Gubbins back yard. The Gubbinses had watched the two pack the old burro.

"Durango will feel more at home out thar," said Lucky John after farewells were exchanged. "Nothin' like good mountain grass for a burro. But you treat her gentle, or I'll climb aboard your withers and claw your backbones naked! And you bring her back: I aint forgot about that shovel you borried off me and I never saw ag'in."

"We'll look after her, John," promised Mr. Hightower, as he led the burro out into the alley.

"'Lucky John'!" Mr. Gubbins called with asperity. "Don't forgit: *Lucky John!* A lucky man and a happy man."

"A lot of fuss that shore was," observed Mr. Strayhorn, who had been imbibing from one of the cases of liquid goods presented to Lucky John and had been in a happily befuddled state ever since. "A almighty lot of fuss and how-de-do over a few tons of railroad iron! Course the country needs iron scrap, but look at all the expense they went to over that bunch of old iron rails."

"Iron rails!" snorted Mr. Hightower. "You dern' fool, them wasn't no iron rails. Why didn't you try to lift one of them railway irons? If you had, you'd of found 'em heavy as gold. And why didn't you look when I scratched one of them bars?"

"They shore wasn't gold."

"No, not gold," admitted his partner. "But something the Gover'ment needs a sight worse than gold. Something they're flyin' by airyplane out of China right now—it's so valuable and they need it so bad. Something they need for the buildin' of battleships and tanks and guns, and anything else of steel. If you'd've stopped to think, you knothead, you'd've remembered that Flossie Wonder mine of Lucky John's up near Nederland was tungsten—high-grade tungsten ore. With his mind failin', Lucky John come to think it was gold; and it *is* gold—in wartime! Lucky John done give his country more than gold—he give it seventy tons of a'most pure tungsten!"



His First Cruise

Flags of Our Fathers—XIII *by* H. BEDFORD-JONES

ENSIGN CLARK HOLLIS, U.S.N., shivered slightly, despite his thick overcoat. The night was foggy and blind; chill dampness struck through one like the air off an iceberg. A shaded light burned by the landing at the wharf's end. This was Pier 5 all right; but the Navy Yard was dark, blacked out. Except for the sentry outside, he had seen no one.

Boston once more! A pity he had lacked time to see the city, but he had to dash across town by taxi to reach his appointment. He had been Boston-born, had lived here till he was sixteen, when his people moved West. He could remember tales of the Trumbulls and Taylors and Lovells, from back in his childhood—legendary heroes of the first navy.

Hollis had never seen Annapolis. Three months ago he had jumped from a factory office job in Cleveland, into uniform; he was apt at mathematics, which got him the chance. During these three months he had crammed, exercised, slaved, first at Notre Dame then at Abbot Hall, in Chicago. Now he was an officer of the Navy, a ninety-day wonder, assigned to his first sea-job aboard the corvette *Lee,* on some mysterious duty off Boston. Thus far he had not set foot aboard a ship; and from all he could learn, the *Lee* scarcely deserved the name.

He paced up and down to keep warm. A boat from the *Lee* was to meet him here; the ship lay somewhere in the outer harbor. Thanks to his rating in the final exams, he had drawn work of some kind with landing-boats or barges—he knew but little about it. He had not rated very high, but had squeezed through with luck.

So there was still more training ahead, as he had been warned, in some little coastal tub, perhaps a mine-sweeper—hush-hush training of a practical nature! Perhaps it would include a bit of sub-chasing; more likely it would be hard routine; ninety-day wonders got a pretty thorough testing, they had told him, before rating a real Navy ship.

He sighed at the thought. Dreams of glory . . . but there seemed to be a terrible lot of hard slogging before glory began! He had missed the big push on Africa; he might miss more big things before he finished training. Still, at twenty-three he had his stripe and star, and he was proud of his ensign's sleeve. Too bad they called an ensign "Mister—"

A cry escaped him. In the swirling fog-wreaths he had not seen the big wooden cleat near the boat-landing. As his foot struck it, he lost balance, threw out his arms, and in sudden panic of going over the side into the chill water, twisted himself sidewise as he fell. He rammed headlong into a bollard—unseen, also—but it saved him from pitching off.

It was a nasty crack. For an instant he did see stars, plenty of them;



he picked himself up and stood rubbing his head ruefully. A bit more, and it would have knocked him out. He damned the obscurity and the faint light that seemed glued around the post at the wharf-end. Then he saw something that moved.

A shadow, bulking at the landing; a boat silently appearing, six men at the oars and a young chap, almost a boy, at the tiller in the stern sheets. Men and boy were well wrapped against the cold. Hollis leaned forward eagerly.

"My name's Hollis. Are you from the *Lee?*"

"Aye, sir, all correct," responded the young fellow. "Better move sharp, sir. It'll be a bad business if we're seen. This fog is a godsend."

"Why so?" Hollis almost asked, but bit back the words. It had been heavily impressed on him that a trainee asks no questions when under orders. One of the men took his bag. He climbed in beside the youngster, who shook hands and introduced himself.

"Midshipman Taylor, sir. Now, lads!" He leaned forward. "You've had a hard pull. Once away from shore, I've a tot of grog for you. Easy does it; no noise!"

"Thank'ee, sir, thank'ee kindly," came murmured response. To Hollis, such language was not natural. They pushed off, and the boat turned; the wharf-light vanished almost instantly in the thick-sweeping masses of fog.

"Your parole, sir? Yes or no?"

Young Taylor had a compass and a queer sort of dark-lantern at his feet —not a flashlight, oddly enough. He threw a faint ray of light on the compass. The six men tugged steadily at the oars, churning the water. The vapor closed around densely.

"Way enough!" said Taylor. He passed forward a small jug and a mug. "Here y'are; a good gill for every man. Wayburn, you divide it fairly."

WITH sky and sea and the whole world closed out, Hollis felt as though these men were at once friends and comrades, shipmates. His feeling of chill and loneliness fled.

"You know," he observed happily to Taylor, "this is history repeating itself, in a way. I've heard some vague yarn about one of my ancestors being taken off by boat through the British fleet, back in the Revolution, to join one of General Washington's ships. And here I'm being taken off in much the same way, to join my ship! Funny thing, eh?"

The other twisted about, peering at him, as though the words had an odd ring.

"Afraid I don't quite understand you, sir."

"Oh, let it go." Hollis felt a bit ashamed of his confidential utterance. His head was still buzzing from that crack received on the wharf. He rubbed it furtively. "You wouldn't be one of the Boston Taylors, by any chance?"

"Yes sir, happens I am," the boy replied. His respectful air was vastly flattering. So, to a mere midshipman, an ensign was really something after all! "But I'll have to ask you not to talk, sir. If we're heard or seen, it won't be any joke, let me tell you."

"Okay," said Hollis. "Special duty, eh?"

"Damned special. All right, men! Give way; watch those oar-wrappings. Yes," he said to Hollis, under his breath, "my father is Will Taylor; he has a printing shop in Beacon Street. I'm Boston, sure enough. . . . Now, then, silence all!"

The oar-tholes were wrapped in rags. The men rowed with precision, making not a sound, as the boat rippled along.

Landing-barge work—well, that meant rangers or commandos, no doubt. This was part of the game; Hollis felt a surge of delight. Training of this sort was something like. No more book work and lectures! A bit unusual, the way liquor was handed out; but the men needed it a night like this. It went with the commando business, no doubt.

The boat stole on through the bitter night. Twice they passed close to ships, could hear the rattle and

creak of cordage, the voices of men, but could see nothing. The fog and darkness settled around; Hollis realized that his feet were numb with cold, but dared not stamp them. A tenseness was upon the men about him; he could feel it. Evidently they took the matter seriously, and so should he.

A LOW order from Taylor, consulting his compass; then the men leaned over their oars, the boat moved faster. Because of this training stunt, thought Hollis, they were not using a launch; it was a test of some kind.

"I think we're safe to talk now," said Taylor. "The fog will be thinning, too; it's not near so bad outside Governor's Island. A jolly good thing it's early in the evening! Cap'n Manly was afraid we'd be delayed. But, even towing the landing-barges, it shouldn't take more than an hour to run down outside Nantasket, d'ye think?"

"I'm afraid I'm not acquainted with the problem," said Hollis. This technical-training language did not seem to register with his companion.

"That's odd, sir! I thought you were the one to take us there. But you'll know the Cullen mansion and the landing? Three British ships are lying in Nantasket Road, so we must work around outside the shoals."

"Oh, the old Cullen place? I should say so! When I was a boy I used to sail a catboat all over those waters!"

"Then it's all right, sir."

So the youngster was tipping him off! Good work. Hollis understood; he was being shoved slap into some task problem to test out his initiative. Well, they'd not catch him off base! He steeled himself, here and now, to accept whatever silly nonsense might come and to use his head regardless.

"And above all, don't let 'em fool you!" he told himself. "Don't be surprised, whatever turns up. Take everything as a matter of course, and do the job set you. I've heard some queer stories about these training stunts. Don't get rattled!"

It was a long pull and no mistake, but in the outer harbor the fog thinned and a chill breeze made itself felt. The sea was dark; the stars were hazed; the radium dial of his watch told Hollis it was not yet ten o'clock. He was astonished; he could have sworn half the night had passed away, in this crawling advance.

Taylor lifted his funny little dark-lantern and blinked twice. After a moment came two answering blinks, ahead and to starboard. Tension slackened. Jokes came from the men as they fell to the oars anew. Bulking large and ghostly, a vessel appeared, a voice called, Taylor made reply; it was the *Lee*. The boat made fast, and Taylor mounted a Jacob's ladder.

"Good work, Mr. Taylor, very good work!" sounded a harsh voice. "Did your man show up?"

"Aye, sir."

Hollis was already struggling up the limber ropes. On deck were crowded ghostly, muffled shapes, emitting a buzz of excited voices. A rather short figure caught hold of Hollis and pumped his hand. A voice with a New England twang barked at him.

"Mr. Hollis? I'm Cap'n John Manly. Very happy to see you, sir. Come below, if you please."

Hollis followed his guide to the after companion and below. Not a corvette after all, but apparently a schooner! And none too much discipline, either. Down the ladder and into a smelly little cabin with a table and an oil lamp slung in gimbals above. A hell of a Navy ship this was!

However, with no surprise in his face, Hollis took seat at the table, Manly opposite. Not a large man, Manly was sea-bronzed, brisk, cordial; his ring of authority at once was felt. He shoved a mug across the table, took one for himself from a rack, and from a wicker-covered decanter he poured a generous snifter.

"A bit of rum will warm you up, sir," he said; "then to work. A toast, Mr. Hollis— To our new ensign, and may God make us worthy to serve under her!"

A singular sort of toast—could he be referring to Ensign Hollis? No. Manly's look and gesture indicated a large flag heaped on one corner of the table. At first glance Hollis took it to be the usual Stars and Stripes; then he was astonished to see that it had no stars. Instead, the upper corner carried what looked like a British Union Jack. Queer!

A new ensign, eh? Probably designed by some long-haired Washington bureau for this corps, Hollis reflected, as he put down his rum. It was bitter cold here in the cabin, and Manly retained his wraps.

"Now, sir," said the Captain, "we're dependent upon you to locate the Cullen mansion with exactness. It's somewhere on the seaward side of Nantasket. The landing, of course, must take them completely by surprise. Can you con us to the spot?"

"Certainly, sir," Hollis replied promptly, aware that a cool self-confidence would count largely in his favor.

So their aim was the old Cullen place—a pre-Revolutionary structure that had been a handsome structure in its day. It was now, he recalled, taken over by some historical society as a showplace for tourists. It was located on a deserted, empty stretch of shore near Cohasset.

"With this light wind," he went on, "we'll be able to lie in the little cove before the house. I trust you'll pardon me for saying that I'm not acquainted with the problem involved? My orders were merely to report aboard."

Manly probed him with sharply curious gaze.

"Hm! That's strange; I understood that you knew all about it, Mr. Hollis. There must have been some misunderstanding; however, I can soon set you straight. Old Cullen, as you know, is furiously for the King and a most notorious Tory."

"Tory?" murmured Hollis. The other nodded and went on.

"A large store of ammunition is located on his property, put ashore by the British ships lying on the inner side of Nantasket Road; because of their proximity, our blow must be swift and silent. Further, some sort of festivities are going on there this evening, and should last well into the morning. Our object is to get the powder, which is bitterly needed by the Army, and also to capture any enemy officers who may be present at the place. Clear?"

"Oh, quite, sir," rejoined Hollis, hiding his perplexity.

"We have half a dozen large boats or landing-barges in tow, and above a hundred men crowded aboard, mostly of the Middlesex militia. All's quite plain now, eh?"

"Perfectly, sir, perfectly," Hollis replied easily. As he recalled it, the old Cullen place lay close to Cohasset. He was racking his brain for memory of the seaward approach. "We can run down through the Narrows—no, not in this pitch blackness. Have you charts?"

"No," said Manly. "These ships, you know, are newly commissioned. Mr. Knox, who is handling in person all such matters, promised a full complement of charts, but none have arrived. It was he who sent us the flag at the last moment."

HOLLIS gave him a sharp look. "Do you mean that Secretary of the Navy Knox himself is interested in this affair?"

"Most vitally, sir! A splendid man, Henry Knox; a bit young, perhaps, but he has the entire trust of the Commander-in-chief."

Well, thought Hollis, keep a level head; remember, this is a test of some sort. Wasn't there another Knox back in Revolutionary times—an aide to General Washington? . . . . Let it go.

"We'll manage without charts, I'm sure," he said confidently, calmly. "No doubt you can give me your present position. I'll take the helm with a quartermaster and make our destination without trouble."



"I'll handle my own affair here, thanks, Sinclair," he said.

"Quartermaster?" Captain Manly looked blank, then nodded. "Oh, a bosun! Certainly, sir, certainly. Old Job Harkness is the very man to serve your turn! By gad, I'm glad of your ability! Luckily, the mansion will be lighted up, and her lights should guide us."

Lighted up—both blackout and dimout disregarded for a spot of training? Well, thought Hollis, it was a rum go and no mistake; but not his to reason why. He rose.

"Then we'll waste no more time about it. So that's our flag, eh? And no stars."

"Stars? No," said the skipper. "We've carried the Massachusetts Pine-tree flag hitherto, but this is the flag adopted by the committee of Congress and raised by General Washington, so it's more fitting for us to use."

"I presume so," murmured Hollis politely. "Never know what these Congressional committees will do next, do we? All right, sir. Let's go."

Be damned if they were going to make a monkey out of him, he thought angrily.

AT the wheel with an old bosun, he took heart. The haze was lifting from the stars and the schooner slipped through the water like a witch; once he knew where he was, all went well. The decks were crowded with men, and some of them were soon heaving at the lee rail; breaking in a lot of recruits, Hollis reflected.

The last of the haze had vanished, and the stars were clear and cold when, with midnight still ahead, the schooner rounded the almost invisible glow of Allerton and held down for Cohasset. Hollis was astonished at the difference in the coast-line, thanks to the U-boat scare; with lighthouses and lights dimmed and gone, the usual navigation was something else. But with this light wind from the northwest, the Cullen cove would afford the schooner good shelter.

Even with the trailing boats, she made good time. Hollis hugged the shore. North Cohasset seemed to have vanished; but the well-remembered points slipped past under the stars—and there was the cove, ahead. And there, dimly aglow with lights, was the old Cullen house, sure enough!

"Anchor anywhere in the cove," Hollis said softly to the bosun. "Take over and give the orders. I've had no sailing-ship training."

The bosun complied. Everything was done silently and swiftly. The schooner glided into the cove, rounded, and her anchor dropped with never a splash. Men swarmed aloft and the canvas disappeared. Others drew the boats alongside. Captain Manly touched Hollis' arm.

"Will ye go with me, Mr. Hollis? And do ye know the house and grounds? Where would the ammunition be stored? In the well-house, by our information, if ye know where that is."

"Yes, sir. That'll be the old wreck of a place to the north of the house."

Manly gave orders and things moved. The men crowded into the boats; Hollis went into the first, with the skipper and a dozen men bound for the house itself. Boat after boat poured ashore. One party set off for the well-house, the main body surrounded the house, whose windows glowed with soft radiance. Music was coming from it, and the sound of men singing.

This astonished Hollis, as he approached with the skipper, men streaming behind. He was more surprised when they peered in at an unshuttered window and had a glimpse of gowned women and men in some sort of gay uniform.

"Britishers, by gad!" exclaimed Manly, who held a tremendous long pistol. He went to the door and beat upon it with hammer-like blows. "Open up, ye redcoats! Open up!"

THE door swung, to reveal a Negro servant; Manly and Hollis crowded past him, men pouring in at their backs. The music stopped. In the entry to the two large rooms, faces of alarm confronted them—frightened women, frozen men. Manly's barking voice rang high.

"Ladies, no harm is intended—"

"What the devil does this intrusion mean?" burst out an elderly man, stepping forth.

"You'll be Ezra Cullen?" snapped Manly. "It means that all your guests in uniform are prisoners to the Navy of the Continental Congress. Anyone resisting will be shot. No one else is to be harmed, I assure you. The house is surrounded, gentlemen. On receipt of your parole, I'll be glad to withdraw and keep my men outside, Mr. Cullen."

Startled shrieks from the women, amazed ejaculations from the men, greeted this. To Hollis, it was devilish good acting; it almost looked real. These fancy-dress costumes, this talk about Britishers and the Continental Congress, tipped off the play; perhaps the party was not in on the game, after all. They were reviving a scene of Revolutionary times, with someone playing the part of Cullen the Tory.

"An outrage, sir!" foamed the latter.

"Aye, with pistols to back it up," said Captain Manly. "Your parole, sir? Yes or no?"

"Why—yes, confound you! D'ye intend harm to my guests?"

"Only to those in uniform, who'll accompany us as prisoners. While we're removing the ammunition stored in your well-house, I'll withdraw and give the gentlemen a chance to prepare to face the cold night. I'll leave Mr. Hollis here to receive your weapons and your several paroles, and to list your names and rank. Anyone trying to leave the house will be shot. —Ladies, your servant!"

And with a bow, Captain Manly withdrew his men and himself, leav-

ing the somewhat dazed Hollis to face the situation. Paroles! A hell of a way to train for commando warfare, he thought. He was conscious of hostile stares, then of an explosion from Cullen.

"You, by gad! You, Mr. Hollis, who have been a guest under this roof—a damned rebel spy, leading these ragged scoundrels here!"

Hollis was amused. This mention of his name proved that it was a game; perhaps some elaborate way of testing his aplomb, his aptitude, his tact and ability. He unbuttoned his overcoat, removed it, and affected to brush a speck of dust from his uniform sleeve.

"You misapprehend, Mr. Cullen," he rejoined, falling into his part. "It's your privilege to serve your King, as it's mine to serve my country. Gentlemen, will you kindly hand over your weapons, give me your paroles, and let me have your names?"

Frightened servants, men pressing to the windows and back again, terrorized voices of women—yes, the house was surrounded, no doubt of that. One of the red-coated officers, a firm, pleasant-eyed man, stepped forward and bowed slightly.

"Mr. Hollis, I believe we met some time since, in company with Major André; I am Hugh Sinclair, captain of His Majesty's 71st. Will you have the kindness to step into the dining-room with me, where we may draw up a list of officers present? As for weapons, we have none but dress swords and perchance pistols; they shall be assembled at once."

Hollis nodded assent and accompanied Sinclair into a huge but empty dining-room, whose table held two immense punch-bowls. Sinclair closed the door, then swung around quickly.

"See here, Hollis—this is a damnable thing!" he exclaimed. "You must know that your brother is here tonight, that this ball is given in honor of his engagement to Mistress Jenny Cullen, that—"

"I know nothing about it," said Hollis coldly.

Sinclair stared at him incredulously. "What? Aren't you aware of the real purpose behind this gathering?"

"I am not."

Sinclair came closer to him, with evidences of agitation.

"I don't question your word, yet I can't understand your attitude. It can't be a secret from you that your brother Lawton, who has been your guardian and friend and is the noblest man alive, has received His Majesty's commission; that Major Tasker opposed it fiercely, on the grounds that you were known to be a rebel sympathizer and that your brother could not be trusted? You know of the quarrel, I might say the open scandal, that ensued? And this meeting tonight was to celebrate their reconciliation. Tasker has come around, like the good fellow he is. What do you suppose he's saying, out there, at this moment?"



"Well, Charles, once again it's brother to brother," Lawton said quietly.

"I haven't the slightest idea; nor do I care," Hollis rejoined.

"By gad, sir, you'd better!" cried Sinclair. "You'd wreck your own brother's life and honor, for the sake of taking a few prisoners to gild this new rebel uniform of yours? Many of us, sir, hold your brother in affection and deep respect—as, God knows, you should also. You can't be so lost to all fraternal feeling as to wish his disgrace; for it's certain that he'll be accused of collusion in this affair."

HOLLIS smiled. "You have funny ideas about task-force and landing-barge training," he said cheerfully; "but far be it from me to spoil your carefully staged set-up. What am I supposed to do—weep on your shoulder, fight a duel, or kiss the bride?"

He was amazed to see Sinclair flush in quick, hot anger.

"You make a jest of it? By God, sir, you're a contemptible blackguard!"

"Technically you're a prisoner, so call names if you like," said Hollis. "Suppose you give me the list of officers here—"

"I beg you, for the love of heaven, send away your men and take no prisoners!" cried Sinclair, apparently in passionate earnest. "D'ye not see what will be said? That we were decoyed here, that your brother was behind it—"

The door opened, letting in a burst of furious voices, and with it a man, a grave, quiet, handsome fellow of thirty, in gay scarlet and blue uniform coat.

"I'll handle my own affair here, thanks," he said. "Sinclair, will you be so good as to try getting Tasker under control, before I have to kill him? Thank you."

Sinclair looked at him, stifled a groan, and went out, closing the door. Hollis began to feel stirrings of perplexed alarm. Something in the grave air of this newcomer struck at him indescribably. Could this be "the noblest man alive" Sinclair had mentioned? The stern emotion in that handsome face, the controlled blaze of those dark eyes, startled him.

"Well, Charles, once again it's brother to brother," said the other quietly.

"I think there's some mistake," said Hollis. "My name's Clark, not Charles. And certainly I never saw you in my life."

The other regarded him steadily for a moment, then shook his head sadly.

"Poor fellow! Has the fever left you amiss in the head, then? Can that explain this monstrous action on your part? Or are you trying to trick me, your own brother, Lawton Hollis? It won't do, Charles. I've borne a lot from you since our father died. I don't question your action in joining the rebels. God knows, I had to wrestle with my own soul before I took the King's uniform, judging it for the best! But you're playing a dastardly rôle this night."



Amid the outburst of horrified voices, Hollis leaped at the murderer.

So impressive was this air of compassion, so sincere and deeply earnest was the speaker, that Hollis uneasily felt himself flushing and embarrassed. The man's personality, his injured yet lofty demeanor, those expressive features so eloquent of nobility and high honor—all this vaguely frightened him.

"It strikes me this is in pretty poor taste—" he began.

Lawton took him up quickly. "A mild word for it, Charles. I took you into my confidence regarding tonight. You're fully aware of all it means to me, and all that your action means in bringing the rebels here—wreckage of my name and honor, which should also be yours; desolation to my entire life, loss of my promised wife, an end to my career. Poor taste? Rather, vile treachery to your own brother. Why, in God's name? What impelled you to this?"

Hollis was beginning to sweat. This man was not acting, but in horrible earnest.

"You're pushing this too far," he began again.

Again Lawton intervened: "Tell me your reasons. Do you cherish secret hatred for me? Believe me, I'm not asking from anger, but from sadness. Perchance, your fancied duty to the rebel cause? If it's that, Charles, I've no more to say. If your conscience orders you to effect this evil in behalf of the cause you've chosen, well and good. Is that it, old chap?"

Hollis felt an insane impulse to become emotional. He repressed it.

"I'm here because I was ordered to come," he said. "I didn't know a thing about it until I set foot on that schooner—"

"What? Then you didn't propose this raid to the rebels?"

"I proposed nothing," said Hollis in bewilderment. Suddenly the thought struck him—a pack of lunatics, by the Lord! That would explain the whole crazy affair.

Lawton put out his hand. "Give me your word of honor on that! You've never lied to me, Charles, old boy; is it really true?" The dark eyes flashed with joy, as Hollis gripped hands.

"Absolutely true, on my honor!"

"Then, by the Lord Harry, I retract my words! Further, I'll stand behind you, now as always! It's a bad business: but if you're innocent in the matter, face it boldly, as I shall myself. You see, these Englishmen are men of honor; that's where we stand level with them, where we share with 'em—honor! It's the thing understood above all else, the thing highest in life! Come," he added, flinging an arm about the shoulder of Hollis affectionately, "we'll go in there together and face them with it, lad!"

SOMEHOW, Hollis comprehended, he was muddling through the confounded affair. Lunatics? No, he could not believe such a thing; and yet no actor, surely, could counterfeit the swelling emotion, the fiery sincerity, of this man Lawton, whose real greatness of soul shone in his very eyes.

"Will they believe you—and me?" he asked, as Lawton urged him toward the door.

"Why, there's no question of belief!" came the response. "Ye see, Cullen and Sinclair and the others—well, they jumped at conclusions! They did you a grievous wrong, as did I in my heart. You didn't get your schooling as I did, in England; you don't know these men as I do."

"They might think I'd lie to save your neck."

Lawton laughed joyously.

"Not they, Charles! Friend or enemy, pledged honor means but one thing; the truth. To such men, oaths on Holy Writ are naught; but the given honor of a man has behind it the whole worth of existence. We have but to say what you told me, that you knew nothing of the matter and did not propose it to your rebel friends, to change everything in their eyes, especially as I back your honor with mine own."

His arm tightened affectionately. Hollis drew a deep breath. Ever since that business aboard the schooner with the flag he had been bewildered. That Secretary of the Navy Knox would be personally concerned in this queer affair, had seemed implausible; then there was the flag without stars—oh, why attempt to straighten it out now? Let it slide!

"Very well," he said. "I'll do whatever you say—"

"Good," broke in the other. "Even Tasker, I suspect, will accept the matter. He's had no love for me on account of Mistress Jenny. I do believe he's honestly in love with her, and this prompted his antagonism. Also, he bears the rebels a mad furious hatred because his brother, a captain in the Grenadiers, fell at the Bunker Hill battle. It has unsettled his mind on the subject, I verily think. What a brave new uniform you wear, Charles! I never knew the rebels had so good an eye for fit and cloth, though the fashion is new and strange. Well, well, let's get in and have it over—"

His words died as the door was violently thrown open. An officer appeared, red and choleric of face; others crowded behind as though he had broken his way through them. He halted, wild furious eyes gripped on Lawton.

"Ha! Ye damned sniveling provincial!" he burst forth. "Rebels one and all, that's what ye are at heart! Decoyed us here—so that was your game, eh? At work with this sneaking brother of yours, this ha'penny turncoat scoundrel, to draw His Majesty's officers into a trap!"

Lawton Hollis stood erect and proud, his face white

"Wrong, Major Tasker," whipped out his voice. "I assure you there's been a miscomprehension here—"

"A most damned miscomprehension!" roared Tasker, all in a blaze.

"Aye, you've tricked us one and all, you rogue; and to think that I struck hands with you this night and wished you well!"

Hollis took a step forward. "That's enough of your senseless talk," he snapped angrily. "Let me tell you and all others that I knew nothing about tonight's business until I was well on my way here. I've given assurances to this effect—"

"A pox on you and your assurances! Don't interrupt your betters, you cub!" Tasker cried in fury, and glared again at Lawton. "You, sir, shall not hide behind a brother's back nor a woman's skirts! Nor shall ye snicker at your poor confiding dupes walking out of here as rebel captives!"

He brought up his arm, and a long brass pistol that sat in his hand. Even now, Hollis could not credit what he saw and heard; but the roar of the pistol, the gush of sound and fury, the billowing smoke, was reality indeed.

TO the crash of the shot, Lawton was knocked backward against the table. He stood holding to it with both hands, a burst of crimson coming out upon the brighter red of his jacket. Then his hands slipped away, and he twisted over sidewise and collapsed, with death in his eyes.

Amid the outburst of shocked and horrified voices, Hollis leaped at the murderer. His fist drove Tasker back against the door: he struck again and again, until the man wildly grappled him. In the farther room, a young woman was shrieking frantically. That would be Jenny Cullen, Hollis thought, and he struck again.

Tasker wrenched free, bellowing oaths. The pistol smashed Hollis between the eyes; he was dazed, staggered, knocked away. Figures were pouring into the other rooms; he heard the voice of Captain Manly, then leaped forward. The pistol struck at him again. He parried it, seized it, wrenched it away from the man. He brought down the heavy brass barrel in one sweeping blow that crashed home over Tasker's ear and dropped him in a lifeless mass.

Hollis could never remember what followed. He had a confused impression of movement and resounding words, and piercing regret, even grief, for that splendid man who had played the part of his brother; the death and blood were real enough to him, God knows! Nothing came very clear until he found himself once more in that chill cabin aboard the tossing schooner, with Manly pressing a tot of rum upon him.

"A sad night's work for you, Mr. Hollis," the skipper was saying. "I'm sorry for it, with all my heart; but such things must be. The only consolation is that our work was well done; and that what took place was done for this."

He drew the flag across the table: the queer flag, with its stripes but no stars, and in place of them the English union.

"For that?" muttered Hollis, severely conscious of the hurt between his eyes from that savage pistol-smash. "Be damned to it! I never saw it before."

"But ye will again, sir," exclaimed Captain Manly, his fingers touching the flag as with a caress. "The first ensign of our country, Mr. Hollis—of our army, of this budding sea-force. General Washington's navy, they call it in disdain. Well, please God, we'll show 'em all that it stands for something, this flag of the United Colonies! Something to fight for, to die for, to conquer for. . . ."

It all fell away again. Hollis must have gone to sleep, what with the hurt and the piercing chill of the place.

He wakened to warmth, and to new bewilderment. He lay in a berth, in a spotless white sick-bay, with a uniformed doctor at his side.

"So you've come around!" said the latter cheerfully. "Welcome aboard the *Lee*, Mr. Hollis! We'll have you reporting to the quarterdeck in no time."

"The *Lee?*" Hollis glanced around. He could feel the pulsation of engines; this was not the schooner at all.

"Right you are. Most unfortunate, last night's mix-up—the boat losing her way in the fog and so forth; but it turned out all right. I was worried over the possibility of pneumonia from exposure, but I think you're okay. Rest easy, now, until I've checked up a bit. And, by the way, here's a letter that was waiting to greet you."

BEWILDERMENT passed again into hard, pleasant reality. A letter—ah! From home, from his father! He tore open the envelope and began to read, eagerly enough, glad to get away from all that bad dream of the night. Suddenly a sentence struck into his brain—actually struck at him like a blow:

If you have any time to spare while knocking around Boston, see if you can find any records of the family during Revolutionary days. My grandfather used to tell some story about two brothers who took opposite sides, and I remember it was most tragic, but I never got it very straight. There was a Lawton Hollis who was killed, and a brother named Charles. The names may help you to run down the facts in the case.

The paper fluttered to the blanket; Hollis stared blankly up at the ceiling. He had never before heard of any such family tragedy—why, good Lord! Hastily, he touched his forehead, between his eyes, and winced as he felt the hurt of the bruise. Real!

Not a dream after all; then what? He could still see every detail: he could still hear the crisp, barking voice of Captain John Manly, he could still see the folds of that flag on the cabin table. And he had the bruise between his eyes for proof.

Proof of—what? He lay wondering—wondering.



"What took place was done for this flag of the United Colonies."

What Do *A Readers'*

WHAT AMERICA MEANS TO SEVENTEEN

SUNK deep in the downy comfort of the best chair in the parlor, I have my nose buried in a stirring BLUE BOOK mystery. I am passing through the agonies of the damned, as the villain seems about to accomplish the untimely dispatch of the hero. I am so absorbed in the hero's dilemma that I am completely unaware that another presence has come into the room. Suddenly I look up, and there towering above me is the tall and gangling figure of my seventeen-year-old son. His eyes are grave; his face is deadly serious. His voice is steady, as he says: "Pop, I wanna join the Marines."

I pull myself erect, and lay my BLUE BOOK aside reluctantly. I stare at the boy with bulging eyes. For a minute I can't say anything. At last, I blurt out: "What! You! The Marines?"

The boy just stands there quietly, and nods.

The first shock of his announcement passed, I become slightly more coherent. "See here," I point out, my voice edgy, "you're only a kid. And anyway, the draft'll get you soon enough. What's the rush?"

For an instant he looks down at me, his face flooded with disappointment. And then the words rush out. "Look, Dad," he's saying, "those sneaky Jap blisters think enough of their lousy country to commit suicide for it, don't they?"

I nod.

"Okay," he says. "Then why shouldn't we show 'em what *we* think of *our* country?" And he answers his own question with: "Heck, Pop, we got a country that's *really* worth thinking about."

Well, that brings me up short. In a few crudely put sentences, a seventeen-year-old kid has shown me what America means to him. It's not just a chunk of land, bounded by a couple of countries and two oceans. No. It's something alive, vital and pulsing. It's something you cling to, and battle for, like your home and your family. It's something you can't afford to lose, because there's nothing else like it in the world. It's you!

Somehow, I find myself on my feet, grasping the kid's hand, and I'm only hoping he thinks that's a cobweb I'm brushing out of my eye.

And now—maybe this is anticlimax, but no matter. I go down to the basement to shovel a few scoops of coal into the furnace. I open the basement door, and there's the boy tossing around a ninety-pound bar-bell as if it were a cream-puff. I want to know the reason behind the strong-man act.

"Listen, Pop," he says, the sweat pouring down his naked torso, "the first damned Jap I get my hands on, I'll twist his head right off his shoulders and hit him in the chest with it."

And so I have a well-founded suspicion that the Sons of Heaven will, very shortly, be catching plenty of hell.

Frank J. Ford,
Chicago.

INTO THE TAPESTRY OF WAR

THE average civilian, who has watched the transition of our small peace-time army into the giant war-machine it is today, has a tendency to think it is largely an army of civilians in uniform. Quite the opposite is true.

After a few months of thorough drill in camp and maneuvers in the field, combined with lectures, demonstrations, practical work, books and training films, our men are soldiers in every sense of the word. This is even more true when, after the first few hours of combat, they become seasoned veterans because they have been drilled thoroughly in combat training.

Our enemies had years of combat experience before we even entered the war, but our soldiers have met them in the jungles, on the desert and in the snow and ice, and have beaten them at their own game.

American men make better soldiers quicker because they have an incentive. They know what they are fighting for. The M.P. on duty in a bus-depot in Illinois, or the K.P. peeling spuds at a camp in Texas, might appear to have very little to do with what is going on in battle-fronts thousands of miles away. Yet their day's work fits into the mighty tapestry of the war. And what is more important, they know *how* it does and *why* it does.

No sir, Mister, this is not a civilian army: this is an army of *soldiers.*

Lt. Lloyd J. Byers,
Fargo, N. D.

A GOOD BAT-BOY

I'M twenty-six, and because I know I can't get into the scrap, I feel pretty darned low. I have all the qualifications, I think, to make a good soldier—the urge to fight and the will to endure hardships. But there is one important qualification which I don't measure up to, and that is physical fitness. A number of years ago I was shot by accident, and never have really fully recovered.

I remember, when I was active, once watching from the bench the team on which I should have been playing. Then too I felt pretty darned low; a battle between two teams was taking place in which I had no part. The same low feeling exists now while world powers are fighting it out. I'm again watching the battle from the bench, when my greatest wish would be to be a member of the American Team. In baseball, not then being physically disabled, I eventually gained a permanent post. But as far as getting into this all-important battle is concerned, I'm out.

But still, as I have thought many a time, can't I do something which would help out those fellows on my team? As a bat-boy I helped my team. I provided the drinking water that refreshed the members, which perhaps caused them to do better than if they had gone thirsty. I kept the bats, gloves and balls in order. Perhaps there are little things like that which I could do that would slightly aid my team in its present battle. . . . Well, I've been buying stamps and bonds and turning in needed scrap.

Like millions of others, I limit buying to bare necessities. Shoes I won't be buying for some time to come. The three discarded pairs that were in the

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MOST of us are interested to know how the other fellow looks upon or solves his personal dilemmas. And with this idea in mind, we would welcome letters from you, our readers, telling us what you are thinking about—about your business now or your career after the war; the war's effect on you or those dear to you; or if you are in one of the armed Services, a letter which would interest your fellow-readers on your recent experiences or expectations for the

You Think?

Forum

attic have been brought down, reconditioned, and polished. Other discarded articles which otherwise would require purchase have been repaired and placed back in service. As long as I don't drain on the things that my team needs, I think I'll be playing the part of a good bat-boy at least.

Those members of the American team need the best of food. I'd rather go on bread and water than to have them go hungry. Serving men must first be served. Again, like millions of others, I am raising a Victory garden to supplement my own food supply. I'm raising chickens, too. I'm a bat-boy for the American Team. Someone out there is taking my place. Someone out there is going to be hurt. I know how it feels. I only wish I could do more for my team.

Mitchell Metzarek,
Chicago.

THE CREED OF A DREAMER

I AM an idealist, a dreamer of dreams, with a heart full of longings for a better world. I think that the poet was right when he said that the dreamers were "the world-makers and the world-shakers forevermore." But the present war burdens me sorely: the destruction of beauty and usefulness all over Europe, the material things for which thousands have labored with hand and brain; the loss of human life as though it was only of the slightest value; the reversion to beastly cruelty. My own heart is sad because one of my dearest friends has just lost his life in North Africa, a life that had in it great promise of creative service for mankind.

My daily thought is that all this *must not be again.* And I believe that this is the prayer of the great masses of people all over the earth. Yet how can such a dream come to pass? Into my home each day comes the *Congressional Record* with its many-paged story of what is said and done in Washington; and as I read, I am dismayed. Here are men (and I believe them to be honest and patriotic) playing politics, scheming for the success of one or another political party, thinking usually in terms of their own limited constituency, rather than that of the nation and certainly not of the world.

And yet despite all this, and much more, I still say to myself: it must not happen again. And I am convinced that it need not happen again, if we here in America hold fast to the spirit which has made our country great. I am an American back nine generations. My original American ancestor was a wheelwright, and one of the incorporators of the town of Watertown, Mass. I love this country and its people and I realize that the essence of our nation is not a race, Aryan or otherwise, but a *spirit.* America today is a melting-pot, a mingling. Many streams have flowed together to make our life. On the farm near my summer home lives a friend from Denmark; my son has married a splendid girl from Finland; I buy my eggs from a Polish woman; a Chinaman cares for my collars; a Greek hands me my groceries; my dearest pal is a Scotchman and I have other friends Irish, Jewish—yes, and German. I find that I am in touch with twenty different nationalities.

So here in America our glory and our hope cannot be in a race. They are in the spirit which characterizes our land and people. From the days of Valley Forge, with its white wilderness of pain, even until now, we Americans have had a dream, a precious dream which is in the heart of all the nationalities of our American life. In part we have realized it.

What is that dream? Very simple in its essence: that there should be freedom for all, freedom to have a home one can call one's own, freedom to walk abroad unafraid, freedom to work and to spend and to save, and to be protected by a just government against the major insecurities of human life, freedom to worship God as one's own conscience dictates in any church or in an out-of-doors cathedral, and freedom to speak one's mind without suppression. That is the spirit which is ours.

It is this which cements us into a united nation. Beneath all the froth of politics, beneath the policies of selfish scheming men, there is this current strong and deep. America, now fighting for the right, if she will be true to the spirit which has made her great, may lead the nations into that world which has been the quest of the enlightened and the free of all ages. I have faith that the better day is coming, for the simple reason that the people of America want it to come, and what they really want they can have.

Harry Woods Kimball,
Needham, Massachusetts.

FIRST WE SHALL BE PEOPLE

A PICTURE keeps presenting itself in my mind, with a dogged persistence and each day acquiring new and added details. It is a picture of our American Democracy as an animate being, yawning and stretching and shaking itself into vibrant life in a form that is new to our generation. Not the democracy of political theory or government, but the older, more elemental form, the democracy of people, as it was known by the early settlers struggling together to turn a wilderness into a thriving nation.

At the risk of sounding like a *Pollyanna,* through the horrible pattern of war this one lovely thread seems to weave insistently, that the old, old dream of the brotherhood of man is rising to the surface and the false barriers of snobbishness and class distinction are going down. I have seen, in the Red Cross Blood Donor Center here, a socialite dowager in mink and diamonds literally hanging on the words of a merchant seaman who had been on two torpedoed ships. They gave their blood side by side for the common purpose of providing life-saving transfusions for our fighting men; and when she left I heard her inviting him to her house to dinner, not condescendingly but with the humble preface: "It would make my husband and myself very happy—"

A soldier from the front writes home: "I remember when we were kids we weren't allowed to play with

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future—these within the censorship regulations, of course.

We will pay twenty-five dollars for each letter bought by us. The author's full name and address must accompany the letter; but, if he prefers, initials only may be used for publication. No letters will be returned. All letters submitted will become the property of McCall Corporation. Address: "What Do *You* Think?" Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N. Y.

him or his brothers—they weren't in our class. So he saved my life, Mom, and he lost an arm doing it."

A millionaire department-store owner has lost his only son in the Air Force in the South Pacific. In his grief, he has sought out those among his employees whose loved ones have been killed or are missing; and, united by a common bond, they have become his friends, personal friends, who might have gone all their lives just cogs in his business machine. Hundreds of his other employees observing this have mentally transplanted the Old Man from the outer world he used to inhabit into the orbit of their sympathy and understanding.

I saw a colored elevator man with tears streaming down his face, clutching a telegram that told him his boy had been wounded—and a prominent lawyer with offices in the building had an arm around his shoulder and, never at a loss for words in a courtroom, he could only wring the old man's hand with a silent commiseration.

It must be truer in England, where the old false barriers were purged away in the common suffering during the blitzes; but it is coming true here. Every day adds another detail. It seems very possible to me that before this war ends we shall not be Capital and Labor, millionaires and underprivileged, Jew or Gentile, black or white. We shall be all of these, of course, but they will be secondary. First we shall be people, American people, working together and understanding each other.

G. R. Connolly,
Baltimore.

A SOLDIER'S FAITH

IT is nice and unexpected to be in New York today and it was such a day—only warmer—that I last wandered round its streets with admiration, only that last time was September 3, 1939, and we had just docked an hour or two after the declaration of war by England.

I was a sailor then and my heart was cold within me; what we had all dreaded had happened, and we felt so unprepared and small at our conception of what was coming; even the painting of the ship's sides seemed to close an era of bright and happy cruises and the grim grayness of war closed in on us.

We were a strange collection, stewards and sailors just living for the day; but no matter what personal opinions we held about England's political conduct, all of us had a strange feeling of exaltation it would have embarrassed us to mention, and the long voyage without any defenses against sea or air raiders went quickly.

I am not a fighting man, but I realized how futile I would be if I avoided the issues, and immediately I arrived in England, I took my Seaman's Examiners Ticket, and volunteered for service on tankers.

I sailed the next day. I think she must have been about the slowest tanker in the world; six and a half knots was her limit, and by the racket she made, you'd have thought it was burning up the seas.

We caught a tin fish off the Canaries three weeks later, but being in ballast, she took a long time to sink; and even I, a non-swimmer, was able to get away safely. We were picked up after a few hours, none the worse. As a matter of fact, we were having a nice poker game, and I had just filled into a straight when we saw the destroyer. I was a little sore; you know I don't usually buy in the right card.

A couple of days in Dakar, and I was glad to escape its luridness. I'm not squeamish, but that place gave me the heebies.

Visions of a nice, comfortable berth home were rudely shattered at Sierra Leone, and I was put on an old freighter, thirty-odd years old, making its first crossing of the Atlantic in twenty-five years. I'll draw a veil over those voyages—even a tin fish would have been a welcome relief: eventually I got home and back to the old merchant ships, glad to walk the decks again of a real ship.

WE evacuated the first batches of children to the States and Canada, and it was a memorable voyage. For four days we avoided enemy aircraft that seemed bent on exterminating us. The average age of the children was around seven, and they behaved like troupers, singing songs as if unaware of what was happening, comforting each other in their homesickness and coöperating with the pitiful handful of adults who were there to look after them. I never closed my eyes on that voyage, and haunted my guns; I felt it was little enough to try and be as big as those kids. I remember when the destroyers eventually caught the subs that had been following us and dropped depth-charge after depth-charge, the children's excitement and hilarity. I remember one little red-headed tot about five asking me to pick him up and show him the "submalee!"

Two more trips bringing more children over, and I felt I could not stand any more. I knew if anything happened to any of the ships while I was on it, and the kids were drowned, I would not want to live. And even though I was not on the *City of Benares* when it went down, sometimes I can visualize those scenes that occurred that day, and I feel I could tear any Nazi to pieces. I'm not a bloodthirsty man, but I hate to think what I would do to one of them if God gave me the chance.

After I explained how I felt to my C. O., he gave me permission to join the R. A. C. I had left school too early and I was regretfully turned down, so I worked my passage to Canada and met a more cheerful response from the R. C. A. F. But the machinery of enlistment seemed slow and hearing that an ack-ack battery were going immediately overseas, I enlisted as a gunner. And though my heart misgave me at the thought of a dive bomber tearing down at me, I hoped to God I would stand up and give it to him when he came.

Being in an anti-aircraft battery in England in late 1940 and early 1941 was no fun, but it made me feel good to be fighting back and seeing our boys bring them down. The blitzes I will pass over; much has been written and displayed far more graphically than I can ever do. But after May, 1941, when the sting was taken out of the Jerry's tail, I felt I was being unfair to be enjoying the lull and the peace, and though I had met the girl, I felt that my original desire to bomb them back still held. It had never been done before, to transfer to the R. C. A. F. while overseas, but that was no reason why it shouldn't be done. My wife, as she is now, toiled night after night to pound into my sluggish mind the science of mathematics, trigonometry and geometry. I guess I must have learned a little, as I managed to convince the powers that be that I would be an asset, and by more good luck than knowledge, I sailed through my training as a pilot, only stopping to marry my Tessa before she found what a mistake she was making in marrying me.

It was not to be, though; a difficulty with my eyes made me a menace not only to myself but to every other airplane in the vicinity, but fortunately I managed to convince the authorities I was still good enough material to train as a bombardier.

I AM on my way back now, and all I ask is that my faith sustain me and give me the courage to carry on and do my little to end the war. One thing: I have found a sort of peace inside of me that knows things will come out O.K. Some may call it faith—I don't know; I am not religious enough.

For those of you who have to wait and wait for your boys to come home—buck up! Time goes slow when parted from loved ones; but once they are home again, it is surprising how quick time seems to have gone when you look back.

Sgt. Albert B. Levene.

FLASHBACK

A lot of story packed into one page,

by Joel Reeve

SURE, I was in Jody's corner. I was always in his corner after Monk Matthew signed him in Chi. But I had nothing to do with the first Sandover fight—except to patch Jody while he was getting his beating.

That first fight was over in the middle of the first round. Arthur wanted to stop it in the eighth, but Jody begged and went out for the ninth; and nobody ever saw a fighter take more punishment than Jody took in the two minutes ten seconds of that round which he lasted. He got his muffin ear out of that round. . . .

You got to go back to get the picture and understand what happened last night. This boy, this "Young Jody," is no punk. He is a nice boy, with a good name, and his initials are *"Joe D."* and you would be surprised at his last monicker. Back in Chi, when Monk quit vaudeville to manage him, hiring me to do the real work, Jody was already killing the bootlegs with that one-two. He was fancy, strong and smart.

He had that temper. When I was bringing him along, he blew a few dukes, and every time it was that temper. I guess he quit his folks and went on the country because of that hot way of his. But he was good, Jody was. He was kind and brave, and I love the kid. . . .

You know the fight business. Jody never got to understand it. But it's older than Jim Corbett, that trick of working over a hot-headed boy, calling him a *name*, making him mad, then sticking a kayo on him when he swings wild. It worked on Jody almost every time. It took me two years to get him so he could take it—and then I was never sure.

He would be going along, boxing the ears off some boy; then the *name* would be passed, and Jody's blue eyes would get like big steel ball-bearings, and there would be a Donnybrook out there, and sometimes Jody clouted through, but mostly it hurt him.

But we got ahead, and when we came East, Monk Matthew was wearing the loudest clothes on Jacobs Beach and talking like Joe Johnston instead of a lucky eight-shows-per-day ex-performer. We did good with Lesnevitch and Montgomery, and blew one to Fritz—but you know Fritzie; and in a year we could have had Sandover.

Margie Makin was singing at the Forty-one Club, and Jody met her, and then we had love. It was hot and heavy, all over the Fifties. Margie was a cutie, too—remember? I roomed with Jody, and I'm telling you he really had it for her. He was no bum, my boy. He was straight, and he thought she was the baby who hung the moon.

Sandover was having trouble getting an easy fight that year. You know the Champ—he was tricky and good, and no one wanted any part of him right about then. We didn't, because Jody wasn't ready. But in Club Forty-one Sandover made a pass at Margie, he'd previously been acquainted with her; and when Jody butted in, the brawl began. It made all the columns.

So Monk came around and said look at the publicity, and we could make a mint in the ball-park. I begged and pleaded, but Jody's temper was up. Monk brought papers around, and they signed and I went into the doldrums. We trained and I suffered. Jody just was not ready.

He was doing good in the first, though—remember? He was parking the one-two right on Sandover's kisser, and my heart was doing nip-ups. Then the Champ held, and worked Jody over to the ropes. Margie was sitting there, pale as a ghost, near our corner.

We all heard Margie's voice: It was loud, screaming: "Kill him, Sandy! Murder the bum, Sandy!"

Then Sandover called Jody the *name*, and Jody went after him like a dock-walloper, and Sandy drilled him with that right. . . . That ninth —I'll never forget it.

Well, when Jody got out of the hospital, we went West; and to make it snappy, we started on the road back. Jody developed a swinging left, half-hook, half-chop. He kayo'd plenty of boys. They rode him with everything they knew, trying to arouse him, but Jody dead-panned his way past every man he met.

Monk was out of it, after Jody lost to Sandover; and wasn't it funny that Monk signed Sandover to a contract when Pop Grew was let out by the Champ?

LAST night you saw what happened. Sandover signed willingly enough. Margie came over from Club Forty-one and sat where she had before. Jody went out at the bell and popped with the one-two. Then Sandy got him and worked him around to where Margie sat.

Margie's voice was just like before. High and loud, among the other ringside yells; "Kill him, Sandy!"

Sandover stepped back, calling Jody that *name*. But Jody was watching Sandy's feet. He was sinking that left in there before Sandy was ready. It dug into Sandy's middle and folded him up like an old accordion.

Then Jody gave with the one-two. Sandy landed his one punch, and it was a diller. It hit Jody on the ear and almost dropped him in my lap. I died.

But Jody went back to work, and the left flailed a couple times, and there was Sandover, cold as a haddock.

Jody came back to his corner with the funniest expression on his face. He looked down at me and said: "Pal, I can hear! That punch he hit me cleared it up!"

Margie crawled all over me, getting at her husband. They had been married right after the first fight, but she had kept her singing job while Jody fought his way back.

You see, that head-punching in the first fight had deafened Jody so he never had any trouble with ring jockeys after that. It helped us a lot. But now Jody's gone down to join the Navy with his good ear!

Monk Matthew went down today to try to get booked in this vaudeville come-back. But he's pretty old for that ventriloquism act of his.

Next month Joel Reeve tells the story of the artist Mulraney, and his six rough, tough sons, who had to live down the names he had wished on them—Picasso, Matisse, El Greco, Gaugin, Cézanne and Thomas Hart Benton Mulraney!

THEY'RE NEW

Soldiers three undertake to retrieve their money and rescue a predatory old comrade before his sins or the police catch up with him.

by Phil Magee



SERGEANT SULLIVAN glanced impatiently at the broad bulk of Corporal Tony Milano. . . . On arriving in Los Angeles by motor convoy, they had expected to entrain immediately. And an unexpected delay in schedule promised nothing but a dreary wait, until the little man made the amazing discovery that a twenty-dollar bill had survived their farewell to the desert.

Sergeant Sullivan was quite willing to admit that the City of the Angels looked very good after three months on the desert—but not that good. "Tony," he demanded, "are you going to stand there all day and eye-hustle?"

Tony Milano's chest rose and fell. He sighed deeply. "White women," he murmured. "Thousands of 'em!"

They walked toward the Union Station, stepping high as befits men on whom fortune has smiled pleasantly.

"Big John's sure hopped up about seeing L.A.," Tony said. "He even forgets to scream when he got stuck with that loading detail. Say, you got the dough with you?"

The little man shook his head. "Left it with John, just in case."

Skirting the station, they picked their way through the rail yard, quickening their pace as empty trucks rattled past.

Big John Ross hailed them from the top of a flat-car. "Hiya, fellers!" he called. "Come on up."

Gazing at the six-foot-four-inch figure, Sergeant Sullivan frowned thoughtfully. "What for, John?" he objected. "Let's get going."

Big John's smile was superior. "We got to wait awhile, Sully," he said. "Come on up. I got news for you."

The little man climbed up on the car, a very hollow feeling gathering quickly in his stomach.

"I been thinking—" Big John began.

"I knew it," Tony broke in. "Why can't you let Sully do the thinking?"

Hands on hips, Sully faced the big one. "Give out!" he ordered.

"What's the matter, Sully?" Big John asked. "I just been thinking, that's all. I get to thinking how none of us has ever seen L.A. before, and how having only a lousy twenty is liable to cramp our style, so—"

Sully held up a hand. "Spare me the sordid details," he said. "Just let me have it in one sharp pain. What did you do with my twenty?"

"Well, I get talking to Paddy Ronan, and—"

The little man groaned. "And I suppose Paddy offered to take the twenty, run it up to a real stack, and get back here in plenty of time for us to hit the town?"

"Yah, Sully, but—"

"And you let that old nature faker have my twenty dollars?"

Turning from the little man's chilly stare, Big John appealed to Tony. "We done it before, Tony. Remember that time in Boston? And the other time in Philly?"

Tony registered two hundred and thirty pounds of scowling disapproval.

Big John looked pleadingly at Sully. "You know how Paddy is, Sully," he said. "That white hair, and that poor-pitiful-old-man act of his, is dough on the barrel-head in any town."

AGAIN



Big John growled, "We're hunting for an old guy." The room-clerk faltered, "In 204, but—"

"Paddy Ronan is the smartest old soldier in this man's army," Sully acknowledged "He not only can, but does outsmart everyone he meets. Occasionally including himself," the little man added angrily.

"We staked him before, and always come out the long end," Big John insisted.

"But we always went with him and choked him off while his feet were still on the ground," Sully said.

"And that's the guy you leave out of your sight with *our* dough!" Tony growled. "Well, I still got half a buck; we can have coffee after a while."

"I'm sorry, fellers," Big John said.

THE stricken look on the big one's face was more than Sully could take. "Forget it, John," he said. "We've seen lots of towns; they're all alike. But we gotta be moving. And if we're lucky we'll find old Sin and Sorrow."

"But, Sully," Tony protested, "how can we find him in a place this size? A town we don't know."

"Paddy doesn't know the town either," Sully snapped. "But we do know Paddy. And if we catch him before he really broadens out, we'll have the kind of a time John was thinking about."

"You may have something, Sully," Tony agreed. "The old hypocrite aint changed his tactics since Dewey took Manila."

"Let's go," Big John boomed.

"If he runs to form, we've got an outside chance," Sully said. "Did he take his barracks bag?"

"Yah."

"That means he's wearing civies," the little man said.

"Civies?" Tony questioned. "He can't wear civies, even if he is retiring next month."

"Yah," Big John cut in. "It's against the regulations."

"Paddy has reduced Army regulations to their simplest formula," the little man explained. "In his book they apply only to second lieutenants and noncommissioned officers below Grade Three. Look for one of those 'press-'em-while-you-wait' places."

Big John was the first to see the tailor's sign. "There's one, Sully," he called.

The tailor was very helpful. "Sure," he said, "I remember him. A pleasant old geezer with bushy white hair. Asked a lot of questions about the joints around here. But you could tell by looking, that a nice old guy like him wouldn't go in any of those places."

"Of course not," Sully assured him.

"So what's the harm?" the tailor said. "I tell him anyway. And he walks out of here looking just like a Congressman, double-breasted blue serge suit, string tie and all."

"He would," the little man muttered.

"What did you say, soldier?" the tailor asked suspiciously.

"Nothing. I was just wondering about those joints you mentioned. He's really a lovely old soul, but terribly curious. And it's possible he might wander into one of them."

"That's bad," the tailor said. "Gambling joints are no place for nice old guys who don't know their way around Maybe you should look for him."

"That's an idea," Sully said. "I should have thought of it myself."

"I'll write 'em down for you," the tailor offered, anxious to amend his contribution to delinquency.

HE scribbled hastily on the back of an envelope. "There you are. The cigar store on Third's got a crap-game. You can play blackjack in the pool-room at the other end of the block; and at the corner of Ninth there's a barber-shop with a poker game on the second floor. You won't have any trouble. Tell 'em Benny sent you."

Grabbing the envelope, Sully rushed for the door. "Thanks a million. Benny," he called over his shoulder.

Looking around for street numbers, he gave hasty directions. "John, you take the barber-shop. Tony and I'll crack the cigar-store and the pool-room. If you have to blast Paddy out, dust straight for the station: if not, cut back toward us. And John," the little man added severely, "don't put the lump on anvone if you can possibly help it."

"You know me, Sully," Big John said indignantly.

"Exactly," the little man said. "Get going."



"One of those old-fashioned shooters, an old guy, always blowing on the dice."

His own stride cut down to Sully's pace, Tony stared at Big John's fast-disappearing back. "Do you think it's smart to let him go by himself?" he asked.

"Big John," the little man said, "knows what he knows."

"Yeah," Tony admitted grudgingly, "even if he don't know a hell of a lot. Well, here's Third Street. And there's the cigar-store."

"I'll do the talking," Sully cautioned. "And what I told John goes for you too."

Grinning, he nodded toward a plate-glass window. "Look, a candy store on one corner, and they have a crap-game on the next."

"All the yokels aint in New York," Tony said.

Crossing the street, they entered the cigar-store, and waited impatiently for the clerk to dispose of a customer.

"What'll you have, soldier?" the clerk inquired.

Sully glanced around the store. "We're just looking for a little excitement," he said.

"I don't know what you mean," the clerk said. "This is a cigar-store."

"Benny seemed to think you'd know," the little man suggested.

"You boys friends of Benny's?"

"Very old friends," Sully said.

"There won't be anything doing until tonight," the clerk said. "We had a game going, but some guy got hotter than a three-alarm fire and broke it up."

"Much of a game?" Sully inquired casually.

"You know how crap-games are," the clerk said. "Everybody wins; everybody loses. When this guy gets the dice, he makes six passes without a drag. Got away with maybe fifty-sixty dollars."

"Young fellow?"

"Naw, an old guy. One of those old-fashioned shooters, always blowing on the dice."

"Wish we'd been here," Sully said. "Where do you play?"

"Right through here. I'll show you." Leading the way to a room beyond the store, the clerk pointed to a green-topped table.

SULLY looked down at a pair of dice, on which the fateful numerals two and five were uppermost. "That the old fellow's last roll?" he asked.

"Yeah, a natural. Six passes, and every one a natural."

Picking up the dice, the little man ran a finger over the exposed surfaces. "Big town!" he thought contemptuously, feeling the hardened traces of sugared saliva. He nodded to the clerk. "Thanks," he said.

Outside, a crumpled paper bag lay in the gutter.

"What did you do with the twenty?"



"Caramels," Sully stated.

Tony shook his head. "Salt-water taffy," he argued.

"Caramels," the little man insisted. He kicked the bag, and the caramels rolled into the street. "Paddy's pyramiding our stack, all right," he sighed. "But he's moving faster than I figured. Let's go!"

Two of the six pool-tables were in use, but the card table next to the counter was deserted, the cards scattered across the felt.

A fat man leaned on the counter, and gloomily chewed an unlit cigar.

"Benny sent us," the little man explained, while Tony sat at the table and carelessly riffled through the cards.

"Benny sends too many guys," the cigar-chewer complained.

"I don't understand," Sully said. "Benny said we could play a little blackjack."

"So Benny said you could play a little blackjack? So suppose you play it with the last guy Benny sends! Forty bucks, it cost me. So suppose you lam outa here."

"Okay, Mister," the little man shrugged. "It's your joint."

The sun had dipped behind the buildings, and the last orange rays of daylight were fading faster than Sully's hopes. "Step on it, Tony," he urged doggedly.

Lowering his head, Tony bucked into crowds streaming from stores and offices.

Racing along in Tony's wake, Sully panted: "How long do you think he was in there, Tony?"

"Not long," Tony grunted. "Only the face cards were crimped."

"Two-way?"

"Yeah. Diagonal."

That was Paddy, the little man thought. Quickly he made mental calculations on the time required for the proper application of larceny. Poker was slow. Paddy must have made the barber-shop last. "I sure hope John's got him surrounded," he said.

"Well, take another hope, Sully. Here comes John now."

Big John elbowed toward them. "Did you find him, fellers?" he asked.

"Sure," Tony growled. "Sully's got him under his hat."

"Skip it," the little man snapped. "What do you know, John?"

"He was there all right, Sully. He clipped them monkeys for about thirty fish. I have a tough time. Seems lotsa old guys play there, and all I can find out at first is that some old goof made a hit and scrambled with it."

"How do you know it was Paddy?"

Big John smiled modestly. "I was hoping you'd ask me that, Sully," he said. "I out-finagle them."

"You what?" Tony demanded.

"I slicker 'em," Big John explained. "All the time these guys are beating the Wailing Wall, I'm at the table dealing solitaire. There's five decks, and the third one is it."



Big John looked pleadingly at Sully.

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson

"What was missing?" the little man asked sadly. "As if I didn't know!"

"The four kings."

"Well," Tony said, "it was fun while it lasted."

"It isn't over yet," the little man insisted. "I want to look around the vicinity of that barber-shop. Get going. And don't talk to me."

BIG JOHN and Tony, shoulder to shoulder, made a path through traffic. Angry protests dropped to murmurs as jostled citizens glanced at Big John's towering figure, then gazed in unbelief at Tony's bulk.

"Paddy's clipped all the places he knew about," Sully thought. "But of course he couldn't be satisfied with half the money in the world. Oh, no, he'll be sitting somewhere talking big, and waiting for the slickers."

"Here it is, Sully," Big John said.

The little man looked up, down and across the street. He watched the pale lights of the Coastal dim-out blink on in stores, lunchrooms and haberdashery shops. He shook his head.

"Nothing here quite elegant enough for Paddy," he said. "Not with that roll."

A carefully shaded bulb winked in the gloom, its dull glow illuminating a sign reading, "MOTHER FLAHERTY'S STEAKS AND CHOPS."

Sully stared at the sign. "That could be it," he ventured. "Let's go."

The interior of the restaurant was warmly lighted, the covers clean and inviting. Passing up booths and tables, they seated themselves at the counter.

A rosy-cheeked woman emerged from the kitchen.

At sight of her gray temples and pleasant face, Sully's hopes again soared skyward. Here was someone Paddy would enjoy bragging to.

"Are you Mother Flaherty?" he inquired.

"Yes," she smiled. "Can I help you?"

"We'd like some coffee," Sully said, "and we hope, some information. My uncle from out of town has been visiting me. Somehow we lost him right here in this neighborhood."

"It's easy to do," she sympathized. "But what makes you think I could help?"

"You have the most attractive place around here," Sully explained. "And Uncle is a trencherman of the old school, among other things. If he has been in here, I'm sure he wouldn't leave without passing the time of day with you."

Mother Flaherty busied herself with the coffee. "Your uncle wouldn't be a big business man from Des Moines, with thick white hair and a blue serge suit?" she questioned.

"That's him," Sully stated.

"He was here," she said. "He had the plank steak special. I don't usually serve that on week-days, but I haven't listened to such grand conversation since I left the Old Country. He'll be back around nine," she volunteered shyly, "just as soon as he closes the deal he's working on."

"That's Uncle," the little man said. "Always hustling—mind like a steel trap." (To himself he added: "And I hope it closes on his neck, the flannel-mouthed old ape!")

"Did Uncle say where he was going to transact this business?" he inquired casually.

"He and the other two gentlemen went to the Etruria Hotel."

"The other two gentlemen!" Turning to Big John, Sully said quickly: "Oh, yes, they must have been the buyers he spoke of."

"Yah," Big John nodded.

Mother Flaherty shook her head. "They came in while we were talking," she said. "They had some sort of scheme for making money. But your uncle had a much better one, and out of the kindness of his heart he let them in on it."

THE little man rose hastily. Paddy would be nearing his peak now. And whatever the deal, Paddy's genius for disappearing, once the money had changed hands, would have bothered the late Harry Houdini. "Where is the Etruria Hotel?" he asked.

Tony laid his half-dollar on the counter, and Big John edged toward the door.

"It's one block east and three blocks south of here," she said. "But you shouldn't be bothering your uncle while he's at his business."

Sully laughed. "We won't bother him," he said. "We'll just go over and wait for him. Good night, Mother, and thanks a lot."

Big John looked up and down the street. "Which way is south?" he demanded. "I wanta talk to that old skate. Imagine him taking that nice lady for a hayride!"

"Paddy can't help it," Sully said. "Pouring oil on the ladies is as natural as breathing to him."

"He shouldn't breathe so much," Big John fumed.

"Des Moines!" Tony sputtered. "What'd he do if they asked him to spell it?"

"He'd have an answer for that one too," Sully said. "Now look: joints are one thing, hotels another. I'll do the talking. We've got folding money at stake, and I don't want to slice that cabbage behind any barred windows."

Big John waved an arm toward a sign projecting over the sidewalk two blocks ahead. "Look, Sully—I think that's the place."

In another block they could pick out the letters in the blackened bulbs. "That's it, all right," Tony said. "E—T—R— Hotel. Looks more like a rat-trap from here."

The little man sighed. "Paddy's one saving grace is that he performs



Lifting Frankie high above the floor, Tony grunted: "Gimme room. I want to see if he'll bounce."

only for the enlightened. Look sharp now," he snapped.

From behind his desk in the dingy lobby, the room-clerk stared at them in the lofty manner of the Big Town hostelry. "What can I do for you—er—gentlemen?" he asked.

"You were right on the first guess," Sully said. "All we want from you is a very short answer. My uncle from Des Moines is visiting guests of yours. Just give me the room number, and you can go back to sleep."

The clerk's feathers ruffled. "Your uncle's name?" he inquired.

"John," the little man complained, "he bores me."

Big John stretched a long arm over the desk. "Look, Clarence!" he growled. "We're hunting for an old guy. He come in with a couple of the clucks that flop here."

"I don't understand your attitude," the room-clerk faltered. "Mr. Rogers and Mr. Smith came in with an elderly gentleman not so long ago. They're in 204, but—"

"Thank you so much," Sully purred. "Don't bother to ring. We'll surprise them. And never mind the elevator—we'll walk up. Let's go, Tony."

Halfway across the lobby, Sully turned and spoke to John. "You can let go of fancy-pants now. Just remind him that if he's a nice boy, nobody'll get hurt. And give us about five minutes."

Straightening his tie, the room-clerk muttered about the privacy of his guests.

"Privacy!" Big John scoffed. "In a trap like this? You just sit tight, Clarence, and keep your chopper closed. When Sully says *'surprise,'* he means *surprise*. And Clarence," the big one chided, "you don't look like the kind of guy who would keep a secret for very long."

MOUNTING the creaking stairs, the little man and Tony tiptoed down a thinly carpeted hallway.

"Paddy would wind up in a deadfall like this," Tony muttered sourly. "Do we rush 'em?"

"I don't know yet," Sully whispered. "Here's 210—208—206. Stand back against the wall. I don't want them to see you." He rapped sharply on the door of 204.

The knob turned, and the door swung inward a matter of inches. A thin face appeared in the opening. "What d'you want?" the owner demanded.

"I've come for my uncle," the little man said.

The door opened wider. The man inside glanced out on the corridor. "Come in," he said.

Sully stepped inside the room, the door closing quickly behind him. "Good evening," he said pleasantly.

The man before him was slight and dapper, and garbed in the very best pool-room tradition. A much larger man leaned against the wall beside a red-haired woman, who looked as if she'd gone a long time between rinses. Paddy sat in the one armchair.

Without invitation, Sully seated himself on the bed, the tense attitude of the three civilians convincing him that the blow-off had been reached. Silently he congratulated himself on a very opportune arrival. Ten minutes later, and they'd never have caught up with the old scoundrel. For the heart attack that Paddy used in such situations had dispersed far hardier characters than these he gazed upon.

"I'm listening," the little man said quietly.

"Oh, you are, huh? Well, get a load of this." The dapper one pointed to Paddy. "This old coot is your uncle, huh? We meet him in a restaurant. We get talking a little business, and we come to a deal, see? And me, I think he's regular. So I bring

him up here to meet the Missus. Well, Frankie and me step out to get a quart, see? And when we come back, what d'you think we find?"

"Don't tell me," the little man implored.

"I'll tell you," the dapper one went on. "Not only is he about to blow with our fifty bucks, but he has the crust to ask the Missus to go with him."

The little man grinned. Such a dodge to use on Sergeant Ronan! He clucked sympathetically.

The old soldier sputtered angrily.

"Shut up, Paddy," Sully ordered. 'Let the gentleman finish."

"I'm glad you see the right of it, young feller," the dapper one said. "That stuff may be all right in Des Moines. But it don't go here. And I want something more than my fifty bucks back, see? Don't get me wrong now," he added hurriedly. "It aint the money; it's the principle of the thing. Either he kicks in, or I holler for the law."

The little man raised his eyebrows.

"His picture'll be in all the papers," the dapper one stated triumphantly. "What'll happen to his social position when this hits your local rag back home? You better talk to him."

Sully put his feet up on the bed. "I'd rather talk to you," he said. "It's a lovely case, and you present it beautifully. But it has certain, shall we say, basic weaknesses?"

"I don't get ya," the dapper one warned.

"You will," Sully assured him brightly. "Let's take it piece by piece: There's you the bright boy, your gorilla, and your girl friend. A strictly orthodox set-up. But frankly, you're not so smart, and your gorilla's not nearly as tough as he imagines; and if that fluff over there is a lady, I am a Chinese pagoda."

"Why you lousy rat," the bigger man cut in. "I'll—"

"Leave him finish, Frankie," the dapper one said.

"Thank you," the little man said. "I really feel terrible about this, especially when I look at the big business man from Des Moines.... Slickers, compared with him you're strictly fourteen carat."

Sully leaned back on the bed. "In the first place," he continued, "he isn't my uncle. And if he was, I'd deny it. He's never been in Des Moines. And he hasn't any more social position than a skunk. Slickers, meet Sergeant Paddy Ronan, the doughboy's *Dracula.*"

The red-head broke the silence. "So it's a runaround!" she screamed. "Well, what are you waiting for? Kick their teeth in and let's get out of here. I'll smack that little punk myself."

Sliding off the bed, Sully ducked under her clawing fingers. "Gently, gently, my pretty," he admonished. He opened the door, and Tony and Big John swept into the room.

"He's for me!" Big John roared, pointing to the muscle-man.

"Nuts to you!" Tony challenged. "You take the skinny guy. I let you have the bouncer in the Desert Café last night."

"Spigs don't count," Big John insisted. He seized the dapper one by the necktie, and twined his free hand in the muscle-man's hair. "Gee, Tony, look how fierce he is! Hey, Sully! Lookit!"

Big John tightened his grip. "Come on, Willie," he encouraged "Make a face for Sully."

The dapper one's hand crept toward his armpit, and the red-head flattened herself against the wall.

"Better not," Sully advised. "The boys are very unreasonable about things like that. And you might want to use that arm again."

Big John took a turn on the necktie, and the dapper one's hands flew to his throat.

Taking foul advantage of Big John's abstraction, Tony heaved mightily, leaving John with nothing but a handful of the muscle-man's hair.

Lifting Frankie high above the floor, Tony grunted: "Gimme room. I want to see if he'll bounce."

"Hold it!" the little man snapped.

Reluctantly Tony lowered Frankie to the floor, and Big John let the dapper one's necktie slip through his fingers.

"We'll credit these people with a delaying action that was much to our advantage," Sully said. He turned to the old soldier. "Loud music and soft lights," he said. "And you beside me, weeping in your beer. Give!"

Paddy produced a most satisfying roll.

Peeling off two twenties and a ten, Sully passed them to the dapper one. "Here's your fifty," he said. "Think of it as anything but a gift, and you're even dumber than your technique would indicate."

WAVING Big John and Tony toward the door, he looked at the three very disappointed civilians. "The old ways are the best ways," he said, "but only when they're so old that they're new again."

His hand on Paddy's arm, the little man smiled at their lack of understanding. "You people really ought to try the shipyards," he advised softly. "There's a lot more money in it."



Big John let the dapper one's necktie slip through his fingers.

No More Nasturtiums

When the herd stampeded, they started other things moving too.

by JOHN UPTON TERRELL

THE rumbling might have been muffled cannonading. It might have been thunder. But Aunt Mercy Kitteridge knew there was no war going on around West Bend that summer morning. She did not need to look up from her garden work to see that the sky arching the western Kansas plain was as spotless as the blue cloth on her kitchen table.

The sky would be that way each day now; constantly the sun would pour down its withering heat, curing the buffalo grass, and turning the prairies into an inexhaustible feed reservoir for the trail herds from Texas. It would bake Aunt Mercy's garden so fiercely that it would be all she and Juley Anne could do to keep the flowers alive with sprinkled well-water.

Juley Anne was disturbing the hens with her egg-gathering. Aunt Mercy, kneeling between two rows of phlox and larkspurs, drew a deep breath, preparatory to lifting her bulk.

"You hear that?" she asked.

The girl did not answer.

"Aint no storm about," Aunt Mercy told herself.

Juley Anne said suddenly: "The dust—look at that!"

A smoky yellow cloud rose up in the south to obscure the prairie that swept beyond the house. Rising from her knees, Aunt Mercy saw first a horseman approaching on the path that ran from the edge of town to the cow-trail along Antelope Creek. She shaded her eyes from the sun's glare as she turned toward the south.

Juley Anne came out of the chicken-yard. "What is it, a dust-storm?"

"It's a cow-run, if I ever saw one."

"It's coming this way. Look!"

The heavy woman loosened the strings of her sunbonnet and pushed it back from her face to see better. Twenty years before, when she and Captain Dave Kitteridge were still quartered at Fort Scott, she would have said, "Buffalo!" That was before Captain Dave came home with a girl baby he had taken from an overturned wagon, in the smoking ruins of Settlement Creek.

But the Kiowas had learned long ago to respect the deadlines of a reservation; the buffalo had been long gone, supplanted by Texas herds pointing toward the new Kansas railroad.

"Cows rampaging straight for town. What are they doing out that way with a herd, anyhow? That's all Neighbor Denham's farm pastures. The loading pens are clear over east."

"They must have got off the trail," said Juley Anne. You had to be older than seventeen in West Bend to have known the thunder of a buffalo stampede. But she had seen countless trail herds crawling in from the southern horizon to the confining doom of fences and West Bend's shipping yards. When they ran, you could imagine they were buffalo.

The thunder shuddered louder, and Aunt Mercy's increasing alarm showed in her voice. "Where are the riders, I'd like to know! Letting a herd get a start like that—"

"That sounds like guns," Juley Anne cried.

"Shootin' them down, I suppose." Aunt Mercy dropped her trowel on the slanting door of the earth cellar that lay beside the garden. Nasturtiums grew profusely on the humped dirt roof of the cellar, a memorable yellow and scarlet covering over the edibles stored against the drab unproductiveness of winter.

She lifted her skirts clear of her stalwart shoes and started in a lumbering trot toward the rear stoop of the house. "They can't stop them now," she said knowingly.

Juley Anne did not move. She could feel the earth vibrate under the battering of hundreds of hoofs. Both her hands clasped the basket in which she carried the eggs. In the brilliant sunlight, her hair was brown, like the fine bunch grass that gave the prairie a rich warm look wherever the plow had not turned up its loam. Once, as Aunt Mercy shrilled at her to come in, the girl's wide blue eyes turned to the house, but they were drawn back again instantly to the thick ochre fog that shrouded a thousand animals driven by instinctive fear to mad flight.

It was something she had heard Captain Dave talk of, but the reality was more terrible than the pictures he painted in his story-telling.

"Juley Anne!" Aunt Mercy called again from the kitchen door.

The girl saw three riders race ahead of the dust. They swerved, as if to crowd the rolling pall in another direction. But dust and cattle engulfed them, an unsuppressible flood. She heard shots, meaningless cracking sounds that seemed distant and muffled.

She stood there. A great white steer shot ahead into the sunlight, taking a sudden tangent. With horns swinging low, it headed directly toward her and the garden. Behind roared a torrent of cattle.

They came like a brown head of water rolling over the earth. They poured over the potato field of the neighboring Denham place and swept in a tumbling wave across the road before the Kitteridge house.

Juley Anne ran toward the stoop. The woman and the girl heard first the crash of the front yard picket fence as its length was ripped out. The house trembled.

Juley Anne reached a front window in time to see part of the herd break along the road, and go plunging in a branching stream toward the town. The thudding against the house wall sent her running back to the kitchen, where Aunt Mercy held to the door-jamb and looked as if she expected the entire structure to come down upon them in the next moment.

The hen coop was gone. Aunt Mercy said, "Gone," as if she had seen the end of the world and had lived to tell of it. She closed her eyes. The garden was a mess of humped backs and jumbled horns, flowing beyond the hollyhocks.

The wave broke, as if split by an intruding rock. In reality, the rock was a rider.

AUNT MERCY screamed at him, "You get out! Get them out!"

They heard the man call, "Ye-a-a-a." It was a guttúral cry that ended with the audible impact of his horse with a cow. The horse went down on its knees. The man fell forward over his saddle-horn, and cow and horse and man were suspended in a grotesque statuary group that held the woman and the girl breathless with its signified peril.

But the little horse pulled itself up. Again the man gave his call—like a terrible cough, now. He swung a long quirt that caught the cow across the nose. A bawl of pain was followed by the splintering and wrenching of boards. The horse poised precariously on the edge of the ragged, gaping cellar-door through which the cow had vanished.

As the last fragment of the herd swept down upon him, the man fought to regain a lost stirrup. He

spurred the lathered horse ahead in swift escape, swaying drunkenly in his saddle, and disappeared among the cattle, in the direction of town.

FOR a time Aunt Mercy and Juley Anne were immobile. The weight of silence which had descended upon the earth in that moment rooted them in the kitchen doorway.

"The cellar—" Juley Anne gasped.

Aunt Mercy made a strange noise in her throat. She heard the cracked cackle of a hen which somehow had escaped destruction and the odd sound seemed to bring her to life. She clasped her hands and started out. Juley Anne ran ahead of her.

A lonely bawl came from the depths of the cellar. After Aunt Mercy had glanced down through the smashed door, she shut her eyes again and shook visibly. The cow was lying among a multitude of carrots, beets, potatoes and shattered boards.

"I don't think she's dead," said Juley Anne.

"Not if she can bawl. But now—" Aunt Mercy turned quickly.

A horseman who had come up near the crushed chicken-house said, "Anybody hurt?"

Juley Anne whispered: "It's one of them—from the herd."

The rider moved nearer. Aunt Mercy seemed to stand straighter, and her doubled fists appeared to find natural resting-places on her hips.

The rider was a young man on a dun horse that sensed danger in this situation; it blew nervously through its nostrils. The young man's hat was pushed back on his head. His face was thin and deeply browned by prairie sun. Quick, dark eyes swept the ravaged yard in a swift survey.

Aunt Mercy's lips set tightly. She saw the Colt gun he carried and the blanket-roll wrapped in a rain cover behind his saddle. When he took off his hat, as if expecting her to speak to him, a shock of uncombed brown hair fell across his forehead, and gave to his youthful look a certain recklessness that the severe line of the hat had concealed.

"How'd do," he said.

"You," Aunt Mercy told him plainly, "get this critter out of my cellar!"

"I thought I might give you a hand."

"I'd like to give you a hand, and more!" Aunt Mercy's face was purple. "What's wrong with you, letting cattle run right through a person's place this way?"

"It looks—" he began, but Aunt Mercy interrupted him.

"It looks like a cyclone! You're going to pay for this. I'm going for Sheriff Bradford. Who runs that crazy outfit?"

"It looks to me," the young man said insistently, "like they was either drunk or didn't know how to handle a herd."

"Well, as if you didn't know!" Aunt Mercy told herself the young man wasn't drunk, and he didn't appear crazy.

He was looking at Juley Anne when he said, "No, I don't know. I was watching it from off there."

The cow in the cellar bawled forlornly.

The young man's lips twisted in a smile. "I'm not with that outfit," he explained.

"Maybe you can get the poor thing out," Juley Anne said.

"Maybe I can." He remained in his saddle, as if waiting for the elder woman's approval.

Aunt Mercy's thoughts cleared long enough for her to recall that she had seen a rider approaching on the path from Antelope Creek, before the cattle came. "Well, who are you?" she said. "And where are you traveling?"

HE answered, "Tarbell, ma'am, Bus Tarbell." He looked at Juley Anne again. "That is, Bus is what the boys down at Colonel Sutherland's always called me. My name is Meredith."

Juley Anne nodded and said, "Meredith."



"It looks like a cyclone! You're going to pay for this. Who runs that crazy outfit?"

The smile returned. "Scare you? I mean—the herd?"

Aunt Mercy made a spluttering noise, and his eyes jerked back to her. "I never heard of Colonel Sutherland," she said.

"Colonel Preston Sutherland. He's dead. I come up from Texas with a herd from his ranch, but we shipped at Oland. I expect that's fifty miles east."

"Sixty," said Aunt Mercy. "I didn't think there ever was a Colonel Sutherland in the cavalry troops up here."

The young man dismounted. "He was a major in the war. In Kentucky, that was. He come out West after the war."

"Raised his own rank, eh? Or how'd he get to be called Colonel?"

A troubled look made Tarbell's eyes darker. "Maybe like I got to be called Bus."

Juley Anne whispered, "The cow, the poor cow."

"I'll see about it." He chanced a laugh as he looked down into the pit, but kept it short.

Aunt Mercy told him, with some heat, "That might seem funny until you look at the rest of the garden!" She moaned, "My flowers, my poor flowers. No more nasturtiums."

"The cow's not hurt," Tarbell said. "I don't think we could get her out, though. We'll need help."

Aunt Mercy gazed away at the Denham house. The Denhams were visiting in Abilene, and the old man taking care of their place wouldn't be any help. "Juley Anne, you better go for Sheriff Bradford."

TARBELL offered, "I could go. If you ask me, it's not the law you need as much as a derrick."

"It's nice of him to offer," the girl said. "He's got a horse."

"Your horse looks weary," Aunt Mercy said. "It aint far." She thought that he didn't look any older than Juley Anne. He was mighty young to be riding through the country alone. His clothes were trail-worn, she noticed, and his saddle was plain. "Do you want work, young man?"

"Since I shipped Colonel Sutherland's stock, I just been ridin' around to sort of see the country."

"So!" she said with finality. "Well, I don't ask favors of no one. If a man don't want to earn an extra dollar, that's his lookout."

He cleared his throat. "I'd be pleased to help you fix things up, but I wouldn't ask for pay—only some water for me and for the horse, too."

"I'll fetch you a drink." Juley Anne started toward the house.

"Let me. Just tell me where—"

"You," said Aunt Mercy, "work on this cow."

He knelt beside the cellar. The cow eyed him in terror, struggled to its feet and rumbled deep in its throat.



"I'm telling you to vamoose," said Tarbell. . . . A flash came from the muzzle of the Colt gun.

"She's up, anyway," he said. "I better get them sharp boards out of there, before she stabs herself." He eased himself down into the pit. "She's a young critter, hardly two."

"What," said Aunt Mercy, leaning over the broken door, "is a cow animal doing in a shipping herd? They only ship steers."

"I was thinking about that." His voice rose from the cellar with a hollow sound. "From what I could see off there, that herd had about everything in it, like it was just gathered here and there, and nobody cared what was gathered. No good cowman would drive a herd like that up the trail."

He pulled a splintered door panel loose and tossed it out. "Here, stand still," he told the cow. He removed a broken sack of potatoes from under the cow's hoofs and lifted it up to the surface of the ground. "We ought to have some baskets to gather up this stuff."

Juley Anne came with water. Aunt Mercy saw that she had brought it in the best blue glass pitcher and one of the new tumblers that Captain Dave had brought from Kansas City in the spring, before he left for the Kiowa agency with government horses.

The girl handed the glass of water down to Bus Tarbell, watching him intently. He drank thirstily, smiled, and held up the glass to be refilled.

"Right good water in Kansas, anyway," he said. "Wet as I ever saw."

"That cow looks fresh," Aunt Mercy said musingly.

"She is," Tarbell answered. "Had a calf not long ago. I expect if we don't get her out tonight, I ought to try and milk her."

Juley Anne's face saddened. "She must have lost the calf."

"In the run, likely," he said. "But don't worry."

"Do you think you could find it?"

"No, but I'll milk her so she won't suffer. She can't do much jumping around, down here."

Aunt Mercy's patience seemed near exhaustion. "Juley Anne, you set right off after Sheriff Bradford! I just wish that Dave could see this, but it'll be three weeks yet before he gets in. You tell the sheriff to bring some men down and get this cow out."

"I'll go," the girl said, "but—"

"I'll take you on my horse," Tarbell said, coming up from the cellar.

Aunt Mercy ignored him. "But what?" she asked the girl.

"Maybe Mr. Tarbell is hungry. When I was in for the water, I saw that the fire wasn't quite out. It wouldn't take long to cook some pork bacon. And there's eggs."

"Home-cooked pork bacon and eggs," the young man murmured, as if thinking aloud. "Since I left Colonel Sutherland's, I wouldn't have

dared think of such things. A mighty sight of good food was always on his table. But in a trail-camp. . . . No, I wouldn't have dared to think of such things, or I might have quit and gone back home."

Aunt Mercy's eyes half closed as she scrutinized the handsome young face in the shadow of the broad hat-brim.

"I'll go get it," Juley Anne said.

Aunt Mercy shook her head. "No, I'll put out something, while you two look to that chicken-yard."

When she had gone inside, Tarbell turned to the girl. "Thanks," he said gratefully. "That was mighty thoughtful of you. The dun horse and me dry-camped last night, and all along this morning I was asking myself if West Bend would have a good cook woman."

"You must be starved."

"It don't seem I've eat a real meal since I left Colonel Sutherland's. I expect Jenny's the best cook in Texas."

"Your mother?"

He laughed. "Jenny's the black woman Colonel Sutherland brought from Kentucky, before I was born, to cook for him. She sort of raised me up with good eating, like as if I was the Colonel's own boy—instead of just a maverick sort, that he took because he didn't have none himself to bother with."

Juley Anne stood looking down at the cow. Tarbell studied the girl's soft taffy-colored hair where it curled against her neck.

"I wanted to see some of this north country," he went on. "They told me it was pretty good out this way, and I kind of like it. I'm glad I didn't just go right back home."

"Why?"

"Oh, just sort of glad,"

After a silence, the girl said, "Look, the cow's eating a carrot! She's not a wild cow. She looks gentle."

"Mighty pretty little thing."

"Maybe we could keep her, and give her a name, and we wouldn't have to get milk from the Denhams."

"A name?" he said thoughtfully. "We might call her Muley Anne."

JULEY ANNE attempted a look of hauteur that was not quite successful. Aunt Mercy appeared in the kitchen door. "Land of living, you aint done a thing! Come in here and eat, if you aint going to work."

"You'll find water in the well for your horse," Juley Anne told him. He stood watching her until she had gone inside.

Aunt Mercy made little clicking sounds with her lips, as she began the task of rehabilitating her garden. Pink petals lay crushed into the earth, bulbs were exposed and torn from their roots, and only one bloom in the little patch of asters she had nursed to maturity in alien soil remained.



"You high-tail it out of here," Aunt Mercy said.

She glanced occasionally toward the town as she moved about the devastated yard, expecting to see Juley Anne and Tarbell returning from their mission to Sheriff Bradford.

"Colonel Sutherland, Colonel Preston Sutherland," she thought. "That's all he talked about at dinner, as if he had never known anybody else." She didn't like the way he looked at Juley Anne, and she was distressed by the way the girl had watched him. "She's too young, and he's a baby to be riding around the country loose and alone. I'm surprised at Juley Anne." When she heard a horse, she looked up expectantly.

A strange man was riding in, where the front gate had stood. He was a tall thin man whose shirt was torn at one shoulder and whose wide hat flapped down as if broken by repeated beatings from wind and rain. He rode loosely, leaning slightly to one side. A rifle-butt protruded from a saddle scabbard; he wore two pistols in belt holsters.

Aunt Mercy's doubled fists found their customary resting-places on her hips. "Well?" she said with no friendliness.

"I want to look around this place." The man's cheeks seemed drawn toward his mouth.

"What for? Are you one of that outfit that did this?"

"Did what?" the rider asked evasively. His eyes roved over the yard.

Aunt Mercy sucked in her breath. "You high-tail it out of here, before I get a gun! The law is a-comin' for you."

The man moved uncertainly in his saddle and the woman was aware that he was drunk. She had started toward the stoop, when she saw that another rider had come around the corner of the house and was sitting on his horse watching them.

"Don't get no gun," the man said.

Aunt Mercy stopped. "Who's the boss of that scrabbly spread?"

"He's yonder in town. It's his watch we're after. He sent us to look for it."

"His watch?" Aunt Mercy's anger mounted. "His watch?"

"He lost it, when a cow ran into his horse and nigh knocked him down. But he couldn't get off to get it, with the stock millin' around him."

She said again, "His watch." She took another step toward the house.

"Did you find it?"

Aunt Mercy stopped again. "No, but if I had I wouldn't give it to you. He wants his watch! Well, look at my cellar and look at my yard!"

The man glanced in the direction of his companion, as if to assure himself he was not there alone. "He lost it right here. 'Where the cow went down in the cellar,' he told us."

"He lost a cow, too," Aunt Mercy said, "and I've sent for the sheriff. You get going out of here."

The man's eyelids drooped as he scanned the ground about the cellar. "It was a good watch. It had stones in it."

"Stones?"

"Diamonds. A smattering of them in the cover and a right smart of red kind inside. If you found it, you better give it up."

"I aint giving anything up. If I had it, I'd keep it to help pay for this damage."

The man's eyes were bloodshot. "Come on, fatty, give me that watch! He don't want to lose that."

Aunt Mercy puffed in fury. "I'll *fatty* you! Do you think I wanted to lose my flowers?" She lumbered toward the house, as swiftly as her bulk would permit.

When she came out again, she carried the buffalo-gun that Captain Dave kept over the mantel. The two men had reached the roadway and were riding toward town.

FOR a time she watched, but they did not look back. She leaned the heavy gun against a stoop post, wondering if it were loaded. That was something she had no way of determining, for the mechanism of the formidable old weapon was a mystery she had never sought to solve. When she started back into the garden, she saw Juley Anne and Tarbell coming across the ruined Denham potato field.

They were both on the youth's dun horse, the girl sitting sideways in the saddle and holding her skirts tightly about her legs, he astride behind the cantle. Aunt Mercy's lips formed the word "Scandalous!" She waved significantly at Juley Anne, but the boy and the girl were talking and there was no responsive action to her signal.

The horse was ambling along at a gait quite its own choice.

"That young man will have to get out of here," Aunt Mercy told herself. "I'm surprised at Juley Anne!" She saw her trowel, half buried in the earth, and retrieved it. For the first time she admitted to herself that things come and things go, things happen, and only heaven itself knew why. She poked sorrowfully at some crushed petunias.

When the young people rode into the yard she looked up at them as if she had not known at all that they were approaching.

"The sheriff's coming up in the morning," Juley Anne said; and she jumped down from the saddle. "He was too busy to come today."

Tarbell dropped the bit from the mouth of his horse, and led the animal to the side of the yard where it could crop grass that was still standing. "This wasn't the only place hurt. There was a sight of damage further in town."

"Too busy, is he?" Aunt Mercy sighed. "Did you tell him about the cow?"

"Yes," said Juley Anne. "Meredith explained everything. He and Sheriff Bradford talked quite awhile. I waited outside."

"*Meredith* did," echoed Aunt Mercy. She thought Juley Anne's cheeks uncommonly red.

Tarbell's lips twisted. He stared at the ground as if he might have been gazing off into distance. "I explained quite a few things to the sheriff," he said vaguely. "Maybe some things he didn't know." He looked up at the elderly woman. "The sheriff has sort of gone into the cattle business, with a herd loose in town. He's going to gather and hold every critter. Impound, he called it."

Aunt Mercy looked at the young man curiously. "Is that horse of yours crippled?"

"No."

"You were gone long enough. I could have ridden down there and back a dozen times."

"The sheriff was saying he intends to sell the stock he can gather around the town," Tarbell said.

"Sell it?" said Aunt Mercy.

"That's what impound means. The money goes to people who have been damaged. You'll get some to pay for what they did to your place." Tarbell studied the cow in the pit. "I expect I better get all them carrots and things out of there, or she'll come down with a complaint from eating such truck."

Aunt Mercy looked somewhat relieved. She stared at the pit and suddenly seemed to recall the task that still faced them. "Precious little work we're getting done around here."

Juley Anne said, "Meredith will stay and help, as long as we need him."

"*Meredith* will," echoed Aunt Mercy again.

Tarbell said quietly, "I didn't see that gun there on the porch, before."

"No, you didn't," Aunt Mercy told him. "There was two of that outfit back here looking for some watch the boss man lost." She glanced again at Juley Anne. "That was him we saw—"

"When the cow went in the cellar!" the girl said.

"He had a long mustache," said Aunt Mercy. "A mangy-looking critter. I'd never forget him, long as I live."

Bus Tarbell prepared to descend into the cellar. "I expect if I pull the rest of that door frame off, she'll have more room for the night."

Aunt Mercy looked hopeless. "The chicken-yard has to be fixed up. There's eight hens alive, but that crazy red rooster got his, and I can't say I'm sorry. But there's things around that like chickens, and they're not all animals with fur on. We can't let them run loose."

The youth spoke to the cow, and climbed down in the cellar. Then he looked up at the older woman. "Did they say they'd be back?"

"No, but I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't come looking for his watch. It had diamonds in it."

"Diamonds!" Juley Anne exclaimed incredulously.

Tarbell stood, nodding his head.

Aunt Mercy demanded, "What are you nodding about?"

He looked confused. "Nothing. I was just thinking a man wouldn't want to lose a watch with diamonds in it, would he?" His voice was muffled as he disappeared into the recesses of the cellar under that part of the earthen roof that was still intact. "It would be worth a good bit to a man who's lost his herd and everything."

Juley Anne started toward the crumpled fence that had stood about the chicken-house, but she stopped suddenly and turned. "There's three men coming," she said, half whispering.

Aunt Mercy observed the horsemen approaching along the road. "That's him in the middle, on the sorrel. Them other two were here before."

"I'll tell Meredith."

She took hold of the girl's arm. "No, I'll take care of this. If there's any watch around here, it's buried in the tracks of their own stock, and they aint going to go digging up this place any more, looking for it."

THE riders turned in across the broken front yard fence. The man with the mustache moved ahead of the other two. He was a gaunt figure with drooping shoulders and a thin face deeply lined under the bronze finish the elements had given it. The gun in his belt had a silver handle that caught the glint of the sun.

"I came to get my watch," he said slowly. His eyes, round and dark and lightless, fastened themselves on the fat woman.

A tremor shook Aunt Mercy's cheek. "You can turn around and ride right out of here, all of you."

The man's melancholy expression did not change. "This is the place. This cellar."

"This is the place your cows ruined, and one of them is still down there," she told him.

"You can have the cow, skinny. I want my watch."

Juley Anne took a step forward, and stood with fists clenched in anger. "Don't you talk that way to her!"

"Shut up, pretty!" Aunt Mercy started toward the porch, but the man told her meaningly, "I wouldn't get that gun."

The rider in the torn shirt said, "It aint no good, Clem. I can see from here there aint any trigger on it."

The woman halted. Juley Anne told herself she had never seen Aunt

Mercy's face as white and as fixed in its expression of frigidity. But she had a vague recollection of a small girl who saw five troopers carried into Fort Scott on stretchers that came out of an army wagon—who heard some one say the Kiowas lay in the trees beyond Panther Creek—drunken Kiowas living in a splendrous dream of a time gone by. . . . She was very young then, but something in the look on Aunt Mercy's face brought back that faint memory.

The girl moved closer to the edge of the cellar, thinking that a young man named Meredith Tarbell was down there and that he must have heard, he must know the men had come. The thought that he might be purposely concealing himself sent a feeling of frustration and hopelessness through her. He couldn't do that—he wouldn't—

She heard the man called Clem speak again. Now his voice was harsh and brittle. "You give me that watch, old woman, or we'll find it."

"You won't find it here," Aunt Mercy answered, with unabated determination. "I've told the law about this!"

"I know you got it. Give it up, or we'll tear down what's left of this place." He indicated a pocket in his jacket. "The cow hit my horse, and I saw the watch fall. Jerked right out of my pocket, chain and all, when it caught on the saddle-horn."

Aunt Mercy's fists raised slowly to her hips. "Git!"

The man turned. "They probably got it hid," he told the other riders. "Take a look in the house, Bax. Look careful for it. Jerk everything out. Howley, ride around the yard and see if you can spot it. I'll look down in this cellar." He motioned Aunt Mercy aside. "Out of the way, old woman—" He jerked up in his saddle.

Bus Tarbell stepped up from the cellar. "I wouldn't do any more hunting, Quale," he said. His right arm hung loosely by his side, brushing the holster containing the Colt gun.

He went on: "There's no watch down in that cellar. Only a young cow critter that lost her calf. And there aint no watch of yours in the house. Just tell your man not to go in."

The mustached man turned his horse slowly so that his own gun-side was toward the youth. "You know my name." The other riders were sitting motionless.

"Yes," Tarbell said quietly. "I know you."

Juley Anne saw fine lines about Tarbell's eyes that had not been there before. As she looked at him, she found it difficult to breathe.

"If you know me," the mustached man was saying, "you know I don't argue with boys."

"I know you," Tarbell said again. "And Colonel Sutherland knew you, before he died."

Quale's eyes half closed, but they did not shift from Tarbell's face. "I want the watch I lost here."

"The lady told you the watch aint here. I'm telling you to vamoose, *pronto*."

They remained there, the gaunt mustached man on the sorrel horse, and the youth standing before the shattered cellar.

Quale's mouth pulled down. He said: "Don't make a mistake, kid."

He spoke to the two men behind him. "Go on inside. They got the watch, all right. If this boy makes a move—" He stopped, as if to let the thought behind his words gain its effect. "Keep your hands away from that gun, son, if you don't want trouble. We're going to search this place, and if we don't find that watch, we're going to search you and the women. Savvy?"

Juley Anne cried out, as if she alone had seen Meredith Tarbell's hand move. Aunt Mercy seemed to feel the shock as a flash came from the muzzle of the Colt gun.

The man on the horse was without a hat.

"Juley Anne," Tarbell said, without looking at her, "give Clem Quale back his hat."

AS the girl picked up the hat from behind Quale's horse, she saw that one of the other men had turned about and was riding out of the yard.

"You won't do any more looking around, any of you," Tarbell said.

Quale jerked his hat from the girl's hand. "What's your name?"

"You don't know that," the young man told him, "but you know how I can shoot. Get going."

Quale swung his horse around.

Tarbell kept the Colt in his hand. "If you ever get back to Texas, stay away from Colonel Preston Sutherland's range. It's sort of mine now."

They watched the riders pass the Denham house without speaking. But Aunt Mercy was recalling what she had thought of a youth who was too young to be traipsing around Kansas



alone, and about his outfit looking old and trail-worn.

She heard Juley Anne say, "You might have hit him."

"I didn't aim to hit him." Tarbell's lips twisted again, as if under the pressure of a dangerous anger that rose within him. "I should have aimed for his head."

"You should not." Aunt Mercy knit her brows. "Land of living, you don't look old enough to own a ranch!"

"Colonel Sutherland left it to me when he was on his death-bed."

"You knew that man, Quale," Juley Anne whispered.

Tarbell nodded slowly. "Not well. At first I wasn't so sure, because I was kind of young the last time I saw him, but I know a good deal about him. I expect everybody in Texas knows Clem Quale aint no cowman." He pressed the gun into its holster.

"What is he?" Aunt Mercy asked.

"That would be kind of hard to say, exactly. There's been some things happen down home—like people getting killed and their money taken. I mentioned a few of them to Sheriff Bradford, when I talked with him." He pushed his hat to the back of his head. "Clem Qualé and his two friends will have a reception party waiting for them when they ride back into town. The sheriff said he would be out looking for them. He would have been here, I expect, if he'd known they were coming here." He looked appealingly at Juley Anne. "I'm sort of dry again."

HER gaze lingered on his face. The wrinkles about his eyes were gone. "I'll get some water," she said.

Aunt Mercy grunted. "We'll go in the kitchen. I expect we could all do with something inside us, and the afternoon is wearing."

"No," said Tarbell. "I've got a milking job, and there's that chicken-house." He fumbled in a shirt pocket. "You take the watch inside. I might lose it working around here."

Aunt Mercy jumped again. "What watch?"

Part of a heavy gold chain was still attached to the immense timepiece he drew from his pocket. Diamond facets caught the afternoon sunlight.

Juley Anne looked hurt. "You kept it. You didn't tell the truth!"

"I found it in the cellar with the cow when I first went down," he explained. He turned the watch over slowly, carefully, in his hand. "I was sort of raised up by this watch."

Aunt Mercy breathed heavily. "My land of living!"

He smiled at her. "See," he said, "it's got Colonel Preston Sutherland's initials on it: *P. S.* He lost it to some hold-up men—about a month before he died."

Mc Keever's

EVERYBODY remembers the story told to the prohibition authorities a few months ago by "Lengthy" Ryall, the Kentucky mountaineer who came down from his native hills and stills, and threw in his lot with a rum-running wharf-rat from New York by the name—or alias—of Kees. The two quarreled over their illicit profits; Ryall was badly wounded, and was about to be murdered by his treacherous partner, when the Devil appeared and carried Kees away. That is the gist of the tale. Of course it was received with whoops of derision, and witty comments on the quality of hooch that could stir the imagination to such flights. . . . But I happen to know that Ryall was telling the truth as he saw it. Here is the whole story:

Wallace B. McKeever is well known to many scientists and a few prominent manufacturers; but he needs an introduction to the general public. He is Scotch, as one might guess from his name. He came to this country while a boy, and there is only a slight burr in his speech, unless he is excited, or—which happens frequently—in a mood that makes him "wishful to get mair out o' the gude worrds than can be done by singin' 'em through your nose, ye ken, or bitin' 'em aff wi' your teeth." He is a chemist of sorts—a familiar figure at gatherings of the fraternity, and enjoys a good income from some of his discoveries. But he is first and foremost an adventurer. Fate built a wall of duties and necessities around him that kept him from seeking adventures on strange coasts when he was young; so now, in the afternoon of life, he seeks them in the laboratory instead, and has more joy over some useless stuff that can be exploded by radio than over a practical improvement that will bring cash in the open market. That is not the character which the world ascribes to Scotchmen, nor even the one which Nature gives to most of them; but it is true of McKeever.

I had not seen him for weeks, when one day I found him lying in wait for me at the club. He led me to a secluded table, and when the waiter disappeared, leaned over and asked in a stage whisper:

"Do ye mind my tellin' you a good while back that I'd made a discovery, an' was waitin' to confirm it?"

"Yes," I said. He told me something of the sort several times a year, and I had not the remotest idea about this particular prophecy. He nodded wisely.

"'Tis confirmed," he said. "A great discovery—greater than I dreamed!"

"Does it run to explosions or to smells?" I asked, having had some experience with his discoveries. He regarded me with indulgent pity.

"Neither," he said. "It lives, moves an' has its being. Though there might be something verra like an explosion, given the right provocation. I'll take ye to see it this afternoon. Don't tell me you're busy."

"I'm not," I said; and then, as the logic of his reply penetrated my slow brain, I exclaimed:

"You don't mean to say that you've been able to make life, in the laboratory?"

"Hush!" he said, as some fellow-members looked our way. "Not quite makin' life, though 'tis a long step that way—a long, long step. There's another chap I want!" He signaled a tall, cadaverous-looking man, famed on two hemispheres as a mighty hunter and a traveler of almost superhuman endurance. "Ho, Greene! This is the head table!"

"Sure," said Greene, coming at the call. "Where McKeever sits—you know the rest." He smiled pleasantly, and the piercing black eyes that hardly seemed to belong in his pale face twinkled as he surveyed the little Scot. "Another invention to announce?"

"Precisely!" returned McKeever. "A biological invention. When ye have fortified yourselves wi' a good meal, I'll take ye to inspect it. As a hunter, 'twill be of interest to ye."

He refused to say more, and we knew there was no use in pressing him. We finished our lunch and went down to the street. McKeever was about to signal a taxi to take us to the station; but Greene had his car handy, so we went out in that. A little less than an hour of the hunter's emotionless driving brought us to the bungalow where McKeever lives most of the year, alone save for his Chinese servant and the occasional visits of his two grown daughters. It is a lonesome place, too far from town to be cut up into lots, and too barren for truck-farming; the nearest neighbor is almost half a mile away. We supposed the "discovery" would be in his basement experiment station; but he turned toward the structure, half barn, half laboratory,—where garden

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Dinosaur

A Twice-told Tale from the April 1926 Blue Book

by GEORGE L. KNAPP

tools and chemical reagents often repose on the same bench,—but steam-heated and electric-lighted.

"Prepare your eyes to gazé on wondrous things!" he intoned, rolling his *r's* as he unlocked the door. We followed him inside; he pointed to a big glass case, and proclaimed:

"Look!"

"Good heavens!" I cried; and even Greene, usually as impassive as the Senecas whose blood he boasts, gave a grunt of surprise. Behind the thick glass was the largest python either of us had seen. The biggest snake of my acquaintance was reputed to be twenty-five feet long, and I always thought they stretched it at least half a yard. This fellow—I measured the coils with my eye as well as I could, discarded the result as incredible but found no change on repeating the process—was well above thirty feet.

"Thirty-eight," said McKeever at my question. "A bit mair, now. 'Tis a week or so since I had the tape on him."

"Where on earth did you get him?" asked Greene. The Scot ignored the question to put one of his own:

"Did ye ever see the like o' him?"

"I never did," said Greene frankly. "The longest skin I ever saw was twenty-nine feet, and that had been stretched. He's a whale—and a beauty."

HE was a beauty, even to me, who hate all snakes. As we talked, he came out of his coils and began circling the cage, flowing round it, one might say, so smooth was his motion. I repeated Greene's question:

"Where did you get him?"

"I made him," said McKeever. We stared, and he went on, grinning at our surprise. "That is, I made twenty-seven feet o' him. He was eleven feet long when I got him, not two years syne. I ha' made the rest."

He stopped, waiting to be questioned further. Greene, with his Indian patience, would have outwaited him; but McKeever always wins a contest of that sort with me.

"Will you kindly tell us what the devil you mean?" I demanded.

"Surely. Not out of deference to the power ye naturally invoked, but juist as a matter o' politeness, I will tell. I ha' discovered and partly isolated the substances which caused growth, an' fed them to the serpent, here. That is all."

"I should think it was enough," murmured Greene, as he watched the restless giant circling the cage. "Pituitary gland, I suppose?"

"At first, yes. Then I went further, an' now I find I can get the same substances out o' fresh liver an' thyroid. Juist what they are, I do not know, beyond the fact that they contain a larger percentage o' phosphorus, iodine an' potassium than the average o' body tissues. But they give a characteristic reaction in the test-tube, besides the reaction ye see here."

"Liquid?" asked Greene; and at the answering nod: "Then you must inject it into the animals you give him for his food?" McKeever nodded again, glumly, and I inquired:

"Why didn't you try this on some worthwhile creature?"

"It doesn't seem to work well on warm-blooded animals. They grow—I had a white mouse nigh as big as a rabbit—but they get all out o' proportion. Reptiles an' fish are different; the maist o' them grow as long as they live, anyway, an' it works no havoc to speed up the process."

"Will he get any bigger?"

"No doubt. But not through my meenistrations. I've sold him to the zoo at the Big Town; they're comin' for him Monday. I think he's about as big as they can handle; an' besides," he added, confidentially, "it's no a pleasant task to feed a beastie that has to get his meat alive. When he goes, I'll be ready for the real job."

"Which is—"

"I'm goin' to make a dinosaur!"

"You're crazy!" I exclaimed. Greene shook his head, and McKeever answered with cool confidence:

"Crazy like a fox. Yes. I'm no talkin' about hatchin' those ancient eggs, ye ken, or callin' fossils to life. But the main veesible difference betwixt the dinosaurs an' some o' our modern lizards is the matter o' size. I'll furnish the size."

"Jove!" exclaimed Greene, as the possibilities of the weird scheme rose before him. "If it works, you could put a new thrill in hunting. But be careful, old man. Don't make the Gila monster or that Australian chap —Moloch—any bigger than they are now."

"I'm not a fool!" said McKeever acidly. "The creature I ha' chosen for the next demonstration is harmless." He led us through the building to a yard at the back, enclosed by a high, solid board fence. In one corner, basking in the still warm autumn sunshine, was a lizardlike creature about three feet long. A row of spines ran along its back, longest in the neck and shoulder regions and dwindling to little knobs on the tail, and the hind legs were somewhat longer than the front ones.

"Oh, an iguana!" said Greene. "From Mexico?"

"Aye. As far up the mountains as they could find one, so that he wouldna be too sensitive to cold—though the building's heated, as ye see."

"I've seen these fellows five feet long, anyway," said Greene.

"Sometimes six," answered McKeever. "I'll multiply that by four or five, maybe more, wi' fair luck. I only started feedin' him the extract last week, an' there's a difference already."

"His intelligence doesn't seem to be speeded up very much," I remarked.

"He's verra human in some respects," retorted the Scot. "Still, he can learn. Sandy! Sandy! Come here!" He clapped his hands loudly, the creature came at the call, and McKeever began feeding him bits of dog-biscuit from a capacious pocket.

"See?" he said. "He knows the call to meals. When he doesn't obey, I spank him lightly wi' a wooden paddle, and he comes to order. His hearin' is no his strong point, though. I ha' my own ways o' discouragin' the curiosity o' neighbors; I've spread the word that I'm experimentin' wi' explosives, an' set off a harmless powder now and then. Sandy's got so he expects to be fed when he hears them."

"WHAT do you feed him, aside from your mysterious extract and dog-biscuit?"

"Lettuce, green corn, a wee bit meal an' alfalfa hay, which I sprinkle wi' the growth elixir."

"You'll have to enrich that diet," said Greene. "These brutes get a good deal of animal food in the wild state; they're far from being pure vegetarians. You'll have to give this chap something of the sort or he'll wink out on you, as most of 'em do."

"I'm averse to that," said McKeever, in a troubled tone. "An appetite for meat would be hard to handle in a creature the size o' an elephant."

"Get your dog-biscuits baked specially, with an extra amount of animal food in them," suggested Greene.

"And don't talk about elephants. If you get this fellow as big as a Shetland pony, you'll be doing well."

"Will I, noo?" demanded McKeever in a huff. "You watch!"

A month later, I came to see Sandy again. He had grown rapidly—there could be no doubt on that score; and it seemed to me that he had changed shape in some degree. The tail was fleshier and the neck longer. I mentioned this to McKeever, who nodded.

"The hind legs are growin' longer, too, compared to the front ones," he said. "I didna foresee this, but I should ha' done so. I am givin' the beastie an excess o' the elements o' growth, and ancestral tendencies that ha' been suppressed are stimulated to new activity. 'Tis a more illuminatin' discovery than I dreamed mysel'."

"You'll never die of ingrowing modesty," I remarked. He answered only with a grin.

Some weeks later I was summoned by phone, and asked to bring Greene with me. The hunter was out of the city, so I came alone, and found McKeever in much distress. His pet was sick.

"He got chilled, I fear me," he said. "But warmin' him does na good now. He will na eat, an' seems in pain."

"Have you called a veterinary?" I asked. Mac gave me a look of scorn.

"No, nor yet a plumber, nor an astronomer, nor a specialist on Hebrew folklore. What should a vet' know about a beastie like this?" We stood by idly for a while, and then, with a gesture that bade me wait, McKeever went to the house. In a few minutes he was back with a large bottle, from which, as he uncorked it, came an unmistakable aroma.

"A remedy that's done much gude to man an' beast, an' no so much harm, when used in moderation," he announced. "Here, Sandy, taste the blood o' John Barleycorn. 'Twill make you feel better, whether ye are so or nicht. Down it, now."

He worked the neck of the bottle into the creature's mouth while talking, and tilted the fiery liquid down its throat. Sandy never stirred. McKeever rose, held the bottle up to the light, and swore softly.

"A pint, or mair, at one fell swoop! 'Tis either a copper-lined belly ye've got, Sandy, or a taste three million years ahead o' your time. Well, it should soon bring results."

Privately, I thought it would bring a funeral, for though the brute was then more than seven feet long, it seemed impossible that he should swallow such a dose of raw whisky without disaster. But I reckoned without reptilian digestion. A few minutes passed. Sandy suddenly raised his head, looked round, and settled back into his original position. A minute later he gave a start, and then, as an afterthought, scratched himself on the neck with one hind foot.

"'Tis workin'," said McKeever. The lizard was still for a brief space, then raised up its forequarters, looked around the building with an air of disapproval, stood up on three legs, and rubbed its stomach with one forefoot. Evidently things were getting warm in Sandy's interior. He twisted his head, looked back at us over each shoulder in turn, and presently stretched his neck as far as it would go and gave a bawl that sounded like a steam whistle with a sore throat.

"Lord love us!" cried McKeever; and I echoed the surprise if not the words. It was the first time I had heard the brute utter a sound. Apparently cheered by his own music, Sandy pushed himself up, and for the first time balanced wabblingly for a minute on his hind feet alone.

"LOOK! Look!" McKeever was fairly squealing with excitement. "'Tis a dinosaur already, no less! The iguana has become an iguanadon! Man, I ha' builded better than I knew!"

Sandy dropped on all fours—we jumped back as his knobby tail lashed our way; he upended again, took two steps that way, slapping his feet like Charlie Chaplin, dropped again. We did not suspect his aim till he halted at a shelf, far out of his normal reach, reared up and swept it clear of bottles, tools and paraphernalia, with a fine smashing of glass.

"Here, ye disorderly de'il!" shouted McKeever, springing forward. Sandy answered with his new-found squawk, and started off at the most outlandish gait ever known since time began. He was trying to run on hind feet alone but regularly lost his balance after the second step in that fashion, came lurching down on his forequarters, reared up and tried it over again, with the same result. It was pure awkwardness; but it looked like an incredibly grotesque dance. *Plop, plop, pullallop—plop, plop, pullallop*—he went round and round the room, letting out his war-cry at every other lurch, while McKeever and I held to each other to keep from falling, and laughed ourselves faint.

"J-J-Jurassic jazz!" gasped McKeever. "Hey, ye bletherin' anachronism!" For Sandy was reaching toward another shelf. His keeper ran forward, and the paddle not being handy, brought down the flat of a spade on the creature's rump. I doubt if it hurt him in the least; but Sandy gave over his riotous designs, galumphed to the opposite corner of the room, sat up, tried to scratch himself, tipped sideways and sprawled at length, tongue sticking foolishly out of one corner of his mouth. He gave a vast sigh and lay still, save for an occasional wriggle in the stomach region. McKeever covered him with a blanket, and stood looking down, fairly bursting with pride. "I ha' made a dinosaur!" he said.

Sandy slept off his souse with no apparent ill effects, though his appetite was small next morning. McKeever soon had him back on full rations, but for a time omitted the growth extract. After a month he resumed it again; and Sandy, who had lagged for a space, spurted up till you could almost see him grow. Day by day, in every way, he was getting bigger and bigger—and uglier and uglier, too, though no beauty at the start. His neck was quite long, now, his hind legs ditto; the horny spikes on his back had grown in proportion. When he balanced on his hind feet and peered round with his staring, reptilian eyes, one had to admit that he was the reincarnation of a remote past, a creature which so far as outward appearance went, might have waddled into a Mesozoic marsh and dined on tree ferns. Greene, back in the city again, came out for a visit, and shook his head.

"Better get this brute out to my place on Crockett's Bar, Mac," he said. "He's going to make trouble if you try to keep him here."

"He's gentle as a lamb!" declared McKeever indignantly.

"He won't stay so. He hasn't brains enough to tame and train like a sensible brute, and he's getting too much muscle to handle. He could kill a man in half a minute, now, if he knew it."

McKeever surveyed his pet. The brute was nearly twelve feet long, and though more than a third of that was tail, when standing on his hind feet, he was taller than a man, and already heavier than the pony that Greene had set for his limit. The fleshy tail, huge hindquarters and sagging paunch were the first things to catch the eye; but the fore-limbs were not weak; the neck was heavily muscled; and though the head held only a paltry excuse for a brain, it was well armed with teeth. The Scot spoke doubtfully:

"I do not like to call on my friends to help me see a thing through, and it happens that just now, I am in no position—"

"Never mind that," interrupted Greene. "I've got to stay at home till that suit is settled, and I'll be glad to

put some of the savings into Sandy. He's your dinosaur, nothing can change that; but you can't keep him here much longer. If it wasn't for your vile reputation as a dynamiter, the neighbors would have run you and your pet out long ago. I'll send some men down to fix a corral. You and Lee Fat can live in the shack and ride herd on him."

"'Tis more than kind of you," said McKeever. "Lee calls him a drágon and expects him to breathe fire, but he'll stick. I'll have to see about some supplies."

"Give me a list, and I'll have 'em there when you come," said Greene.

And so it was arranged. Always a man of action, Greene ordered the lumber at once by long-distance telephone, and took down some workmen the next day. It was an almost ideal place for such a tenant. Crockett's Bar is a sandspit, a dozen miles in length and from half a mile to three miles wide, curving between the ocean and the sound. Some of it is covered by scrubby trees; some is marshy and overgrown with reeds; some lies bare of all covering; and none is thirty feet above high tide. Near the upper end, a smaller spit, a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide, projects into the sound; and on this Greene had his "shack," a comfortable log dwelling of two rooms. The corral was to be in front of this—a substantial inclosure that would keep Sandy in and prying vistors out—though there was small reason to look for visitors. Four miles away, on the ocean side of the main peninsula, was a tiny hamlet of half a dozen cottages, occupied by folk who were fishermen once, and perhaps occasionally spread a net now, though reputed to be actively engaged in rum-running.

BUT before the corral was finished, Sandy was in trouble. For several days he had been extremely restless, and during that time, McKeever watched him like a hawk. Then the brute calmed down; Mac came to the city to order some things needed for the proposed trip, and as if waiting for this opportunity, Sandy began to patrol the narrow boundaries of his yard, catching the top of the fence now and then in his forepaws, and pulling himself up till he could look out at the world. Apparently, he liked the view, for the next Lee Fat heard was a racket in the barn, and as he ran to investigate, the door came crashing outward. The lock and staple had held, but the hinges gave way, and Sandy floundered through. The Chinaman retired hastily to the house, locked the door, pulled down the blinds, and then called "Mista Gleene" and myself on the phone with the news that the "dlagon" was loose, and eating up everything; and that we should seek the master and hurry him home with all possible speed.

It was really not so bad as Lee Fat said. Sandy *plop-plopped* toward the house, came across a flowering almond in full bloom, took a nibble at it, and the whole shrub came up with his tug. He moved on to the garden which McKeever and Lee managed between them, inspected the compost heap, decided that it was not edible, and sat down in the coldframes. Paying no heed to the smashing glass, he looked round at the landscape for a few moments, then got up and ambled away. One of the coldframe sash stuck to his latter end; he paused, pulled the wrecked framework away with his teeth as casually as a man might pick a bur from his coat, and started to visit the neighbors I have mentioned, half a mile down the slope.

Jobson was away, the children were at school; but Mrs. Jobson, an ample and militant lady, had hung out her washing that morning, and was now crating eggs for market. She heard a warning bark that ended in a howl of fear, looked out, and saw the grotesque shape entering the yard. Running out on the porch, she sicked the dog on the intruder; and with heroic courage but wretched judgment, the black mongrel obeyed. As he jumped for the enemy's throat, Sandy sat back and slapped. His forepaw caught the luckless canine broadside, and Towser landed ten feet away, with no breath and three broken ribs, entirely out of the fight. Mrs. Jobson screamed. Sandy paid no attention, and lumbered forward to inspect the poultry. A big rooster ventured near. Sandy regarded him mildly, and gathering confidence from neglect, the rooster stretched his neck to crow. He squawked, instead, a cry cut off in the middle as sharp, reptilian teeth literally bit him in two.

"The murderin' blackguard!" cried Mrs. Jobson. Sandy merely swallowed the part of the rooster that happened to be in his mouth, moved toward the clothesline, and sampled a union suit. He had to put one foot on it and tear it in two before he could get it down; but apparently it tasted good, for he followed it with a pair of stockings. A towel came next, and he might have cleaned the line, but Mrs. Jobson, blood in her eye, charged to the rescue. By vast good luck, she caught up a shovel standing by the porch, and rushing in from the rear, whanged Sandy over the rump.

Of course this did not hurt him; but one of the few lessons he had learned was to stop whatever he was doing when he got that whack on the reverse, and bolt. He bolted now, up the hill; and Lee Fat, watching from behind the blinds, vows that the angry dame followed him more than halfway.

Before McKeever got home Sandy had gone into his yard, and Lee Fat, with much misgiving and many prayers to his honorable ancestors, ventured out and nailed up the door. But it was clear that another domicile must be sought at once. Jobson came up in righteous wrath, to collect damages and lay down the law that that damned cross between an alligator and a kangaroo had to move. Mac pacified him with words and cash, and next afternoon, Greene was on hand with the largest size of moving van. I think we all had dreaded the transfer and expected trouble; but Sandy never performed according to schedule. It took some time to inveigle him into the van; but once there, he curled down, peacefully enough. McKeever sat with the truck driver; Greene led the way in a touring car with Lee Fat and myself as passengers and the tonneau filled with supplies.

WE started late in the afternoon, circled the city, drove all night, and reached Crockett's Bar next morning. The truck driver stared round at the empty landscape, the scrubby trees growing out of the sand, the belt of weeds and reeds that fringed the placid sound, looked back over the lonely road he had come, and remarked:

"Well, if you can get away with that kind of a stock-farm anywhere, this ought to be the place."

We unloaded Sandy in the nearly finished corral; the driver slept a few hours, and departed with a fee in his pocket that bought forgetfulness as well as service. Lee Fat, with the Chinese capacity for doing without sleep, straightened out the bungalow, arranged the stores, cooked meals and gathered wood. I loafed and drowsed; but there was no rest for McKeever and Greene; the men refused to work around Sandy without a guard. Protected by the hunter's rifle and the Scot's paddle, however, they spurted valiantly and finished their task. There was a high, close fence inclosing a yard across which ran a stream of fresh water, forming a delectable puddle in the middle; inside the yard was an open shed, facing south, and feed-troughs that could be filled from the outside. This was Greene's precaution; McKeever pooh-poohed it. Against the fence on the outside, at the west of the corral, was anoth-

er shed, in which to store the bulkier supplies, meal, hay and the like. It was pretty well stocked. That night, we slept as we could on bunks and floor, and in the morning, drove away with the workmen. They asked questions about the huge beast, of course, and Greene answered, without the faintest trace of a smile:

"It's a damfinosaur from New Guinea, named after the Dutch explorer, Dampf. Nobody's ever been able to trap a grown one, and Mac, here, is the only man that's managed to raise a young one in captivity."

This explanation was accepted.

GREENE drove down alone next week, taking down a few additional supplies and a motorcycle. Everything was lovely, but when I saw him later in the week, he was apprehensive.

"I don't like it," he said. "It ought to be all right. I've been to the prohibition officials, and they've given the coast dry squad orders to let Mac alone; and I've been to the village, and squared him with the bootleggers. And still I feel it in my bones that there's going to be trouble."

"Your Seneca great-grandmother is whispering to you," I said, repeating one of his own phrases in regard to a "hunch."

He nodded

"Very likely; but she always tells the truth. I can see one place where trouble might come from, myself. There's an independent rum-runner, Kees, that they say is a right bad actor. I went to his hangout, a shack on the main bar, down below that narrow neck, on a little cove just off the sound. Slick place, reeds around it so thick you can't see it from either water or land; but Kees wasn't at home."

"He isn't likely to come five or six miles out of his way to hunt for trouble," I returned. Greene nodded, but stuck to his hunch. . . .

A month or so later, I went down with him. Lee Fat seemed a bit more silent than usual, McKeever was absurdly happy, and Sandy was growing like the list of a miser's heirs. He still came to order at the whack of a spade; but it seemed to me he was growing obstreperous. Greene thought so, too. He stayed on the bar all he could, three weeks, on one occasion, to guard against trouble or be on hand when it broke; but disaster caught him off base, after all.

Lee Fat had been in bed for hours one night, and McKeever was thinking of turning in himself when he heard the sound of a motor. He peered out; nothing was in sight, and supposing himself mistaken, he started to undress. There came a heavy knock at the door, and a voice:

"Open up there, an' make it damn' snappy!"

At the same moment, there was a crash of glass, and Mac looked round into the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun, stuck through a window pane. He opened the door, and five men filed in. All were obviously city gunmen, and three had the pasty faces and abnormally steady hands that belonged to the "snowbird" when properly "coked up." They had come down on a hijacking job, missed their quarry, and, scouting round, had seen McKeever's light.

"What the hell you doin' here?" demanded the leader.

"Mindin' my own business!" retorted McKeever.

The hijacker raised his pistol.

"Another crack like that, an' you'll be pushin' up the daisies. Where's your gang?"

"I haven't any gang—just a Chinese servant who takes care of me."

"Like hell! Turn out the joint!" It does not take long to search a two-room bungalow. Lee Fat was routed from his cot in the kitchen, and the seekers reported no other persons present, and no stores of booze. The hijacking leader turned on Mac with a snarl:

"What's your lay, mud or coke?"

"I don't know what you mean," said McKeever. "I'm here on a work o' science. I'm raisin' the greatest reptile the world has seen for ten million years. He will be—"

"Shut up! What you got in that yard?"

"The creature I'm tellin' ye about. I—"

"Come along!"

They took both men to the yard, but when McKeever would have opened the gate, the leader halted him. "You said you had a reptile here," he said. "Snake, or alligator?" Without waiting for a reply, he climbed on the feed-trough supports which projected outside the fence, two of his companions following. There was no moon, but the stars and a flashlight showed a huge shape, wallowing in the central puddle. Aiming carefully, the hijacker fired his automatic. The bullet went through one of the horny plates projecting from the spine in the region of the shoulders. It was about the equivalent of a slap on the back for a healthy man, and Sandy floundered up to see what the greeting meant.

"Hell's hump!" cried the hijacker, and the three came tumbling down as one. They looked at each other, to make sure that all had seen it, and that they were not dreaming. Satisfied on this point, the leader barked an order, and his men jumped to obey. They took their prisoners back halfway to the cabin, tied the hands of each behind his back with cord, and bound his ankles with baling wire. "Not too tight," said the leader. "We don't want to hurt 'em, special. You was raisin' that brute for meat, wasn't you? Well, we'll roast him for you!"

They made a cursory search of the feed shed for liquor and drugs, but apparently, had about accepted the Scot's denial of such activities. Then they dragged out the baled alfalfa, cut the wires, and scattered the hay all along the base of the fence. McKeever's pleas and protests did not even get an answer. When their kindling was laid, they set it on fire in twenty places, and gathered to watch the fun.

For several minutes, the flames went straight up in the still night, getting higher and higher, and no sound came from the corral. Then a puff of wind from the west billowed the blaze from the feed shed into the yard; Sandy gave a hoarse bawl, and they saw his head as he retreated to the farthest corner. He must have squatted back against the fence, staring at the burning shed till the fire behind him burned through the heavy boards and scorched his tail. Then there was a roar that made his earlier efforts seem puny, a splash as he went through the pool instead of going round it, a crash as he struck the fence. Weakened by the flames, it gave way, gaped outward, and the frightened dinosaur hurtled through and came straight toward the group of hijackers. They scattered like quail; one of their number fell, and Sandy stepped on his leg; another huge foot came down within inches of McKeever's head; and Sandy vanished into the wilderness of Crockett's Bar, somewhat singed in the after region, but not otherwise harmed.

IT must be said to the hijackers' credit that though they drove away in panic at first, they came back and got their injured comrade. Lee had gnawed the cords that bound McKeever's wrists, and he was bandaging the bandit's leg when his companions returned. When they were gone again, Lee took the motorcycle and rode ten miles through the night to a telephone. Half an hour later, Greene and I were starting toward the cabin, with three heavy rifles in the back of the auto. A heavy rain struck us shortly after sunrise, but we reached the scene of hostilities at noon. McKeever had just come back to the cabin from a fruitless search.

"He's most likely in the marshes below the neck," reported Mac. "I've

been to the village, to buy fish, of course, an' they told me a bear had come in from the canebrakes on the mainland, pushed over one of their outbuildings, an' stolen a pig. The rain washed the tracks out, ye see. I've hunted half the ground this side o' the neck an' no Sandy."

"Good thing you didn't find him," returned Greene. "He might have eaten you as well as the pig."

The meal Lee cooked was breakfast and lunch for Greene and myself. When it was finished, we started on the search, McKeever most reluctantly carrying one of the rifles. The rain had washed out all tracks, but we found other evidences of Sandy's progress; bushes uprooted, a young pine tree broken down, a trail as if a log had been dragged through a patch of reeds. Scouting with the care learned on the game trails of four continents, Greene made sure that the escaped creature had taken refuge below the "neck," a place where the bar narrowed till there was less than half a mile between sea and sound. He called a halt.

"Too late to tackle that now," he said. "He's not likely to come back in the night, and if he does, his tracks will show. I can do with some sleep."

"We must try to take him alive," said McKeever, for the fiftieth time that afternoon.

"We'll try, but there isn't one chance in a thousand that we can do it. Even if he's good-natured when we find him, where can we keep him till a new pen is built?"

We were up with the first gray of the morning, ate a good breakfast, and climbed into the car. Picking our way carefully, we drove across country to the neck. Ten minutes showed that Sandy had not come northward during the night. We looked to our guns and started, McKeever lamenting audibly, I with an uneasy feeling inside, Greene cool as a spring morning. We had not gone a hundred yards when we heard a shot, ahead and to the right.

"Pistol," said Greene, as we halted. "Came from over there, where Kees has his hang-out." He turned in that direction, rifle at the ready, and we followed. Two minutes passed; there came another shot, a third, a hoarse bawl which we knew too well, a human scream of utter terror, more shots, close together—and silence.

RYALL'S story never has varied in any important item. The day before, he discovered that Kees had been cheating, and taxed him with it. The dispute went to the verge of murder, there and then; but they needed each other, and a truce was declared, Ryall announcing that henceforth he would handle the cash. They slipped out to a rum ship that night, loaded their motorboat with whisky and gin, exchanged a few shots with fellow pirates, and ran into their hang-out on the bar. During the engagement, a bullet had gone through a case of gin. When morning came, they lifted the damaged case to land, opened it, and poured what was left in the broken bottles into a bucket, for transfer to a small keg.

Both sampled the gin while this salvage work was in progress; they began to quarrel; Kees spat out a tirade of abuse, and Ryall knocked him down. Pretending to be stunned, he managed to get hold of his pistol and fired from the ground, shooting Ryall through the right shoulder.

The long mountaineer fell. Kees sprang up, and stood over him, gloating.

"I'm goin' to shoot your damned guts out!" he said—and just then the Devil stuck his head through the reeds!

I can see that scene as Ryall describes it: the mountain man, helpless on the ground, the city killer standing over him with a pistol, the flat reptilian head, ten feet in the air, peering down at them. They stared agape, their feud forgotten. Sandy waddled into the clearing. Perhaps he just wanted to be sociable; perhaps he smelled the liquor. At any rate, he stuck his nose into the bucket and took a long drink; and at this sign of kinship with normal life, as he knew it, Kees recovered his nerve. He fired twice, one bullet going through Sandy's forepaw. Then came that roar. The Devil's head went back; says Ryall, and he struck like a heron spearing a frog. The gunman's shots and frantic scream ended as armored jaws bit through neck and chest; he was lifted in air, shaken like a rat in a terrier's mouth—and Ryall fainted.

Kees had vanished when we reached the scene. At first we thought only one man had been there and that Sandy had mauled him; but the dropped pistol and the nature of the wound told the truth. Greene produced a first-aid packet and we bandaged Ryall as well as we could, while McKeever thoughtfully lifted a case of Scotch from the motorboat, and bestowed it at the edge of the glade. Leaving Ryall still unconscious, we followed Sandy's broad trail through the reeds till he splashed across an inlet which we had to circle. It was here, no doubt, that he dropped the gunman's body, which other rum-runners found floating in the sound some days later.

"We've got to kill him," said Greene. "Don't all shoot at once. Let me start it, and if I'm hard pressed, you relieve me. I'm afraid he'll take a lot of pounding."

"Poor beastie!" said McKeever.

Sandy was no mean traveler, and for some miles, he kept to the marshy edge of the sound, forcing us to make detours. We were not a mile from the southern point of the bar when on entering an open space hemmed in by a thick growth of scrubby trees, we spied Sandy, coming toward us. His size was appalling. McKeever's prediction of a creature as large as an elephant had not been realized in bulk or weight, but it had been surpassed in length; and as he padded forward on his hind feet, his great tail serving as a balancing pole and his jaws snapping from side to side, it was plain that the dinosaur was in a bad temper.

"Sandy! Oh, Sandy!" called McKeever.

The beast's answer was a battle roar and a hip-hopping rush that covered the ground with surprising speed as Greene stepped forward to meet it.

NEVER have I seen before nor do I expect to see again such an exhibition of chilled steel nerve. No tradition tells the right spot at which to aim when hunting dinosaurs; the jerking head was no mark; standing lank and impassive, Greene probed that awesome thing with bullets, seeking a vital spot. One shot went through the heart, four more through other parts of the chest; and though each blow checked him for the fraction of a second, the brute kept coming. I had opened a raking fire from the flank when Greene's bullet smashed a vertebra at the base of the neck, and poor Sandy toppled forward, his head not ten feet from the hunter's toes.

"Umm," said Greene. "Rather too close for comfort. Now we'll go pick up that bootlegger, and then for the taxidermy work."

But when we got to the hang-out, Ryall was gone. He had come to his senses, found himself alone, and, convinced that he had escaped by inches from being carried bodily off to hell, got into the motor-boat, piloted it across the sound with his one good hand, and delivered it to the authorities. They accepted his cargo and his promises of reform, howling with glee at his story; and he went back to the mountains to atone for his sins by powerful preaching. Next month, when Sandy's skeleton and mounted skin are set up in the museum, I mean to bring Ryall down from his hills to look again on the Devil that saved his life and frightened him into paths of virtue.

The SWORD of the

"MAC, if there's one thing I got to get out of this fracas, it's a souvenir."

"Everybody wants one."

"I know, but me, I just got to. My old man pulled one for himself out of that first shindig twenty-four years ago. In the Meuse-Argonne it was. Ever since I could stand on my own two pins, I've been getting it thrown at me. Boy, it's a caution the way the old man dribbles at the mouth, give him one too many beers."

"I see you don't take after him."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can't get beer here in the jungle on the North Guinea coast. I know you haven't had one since they dropped us here five days ago. So you don't need a starter."

"Zat so? You aint heard nothing yet, pal. You want maybe I should give you the old man's story?"

"No, no, not that! I'll take your word for it. What was the souvenir he brought back?"

"You know what, Mac? It wasn't nothing but a lousy old Jerry helmet. A helmet! They were a dime a dozen. Me, I'm going to get me something out of this scrap that'll make him take a back seat—see if I don't."

"A sword, I suppose."

"And what's wrong with that? Yeh, a sword. The monkeys all carry 'em. The officers, that is, even some non-coms. I'll hang it over the fireplace in the living-room where it'll smack the old man in the eyes every time he comes into the house. But what'll really burn him, I won't say a word about it. I'll just let it hang there, and when he tries to pry the story out of me, I'll play hard to get. I'll say, 'Oh, it's just a little knick-knack I picked up.' Boy, will he burn!"

"You don't like your father?"

"Aw, sure I do. He's a swell egg. But I got to get back at him for all those times he's stuck me with that story about the Meuse-Argonne."

"Well, first you'll have to get your sword."

"Oh, don't make everything so hard, Mac. I'll get one, all right, all right. You know what, Mac? I've got a hunch this stunt we're pulling is gonna work. We're taking a chance, sure, but hell, we do that back home crossing a street. And if it does work, then the hunting is going to pick up like nobody's business. You can trade me for a houn'-dog if tomorrow I don't get me a sword."

A SWORD.

The Imperial Family of Japan holds three sacred treasures—a sword, a mirror, and a gem. The mirror symbolizes Wisdom; the *magatama* or curved gem, Benevolence; and the sword, Justice and Courage.

The most important of these to the samurai is the sword. It's his most cherished possession; and old Marquis Okubo's pride was centered in his collection of swords. In fact, no finer private collection existed in all Japan outside the Imperial Palace.

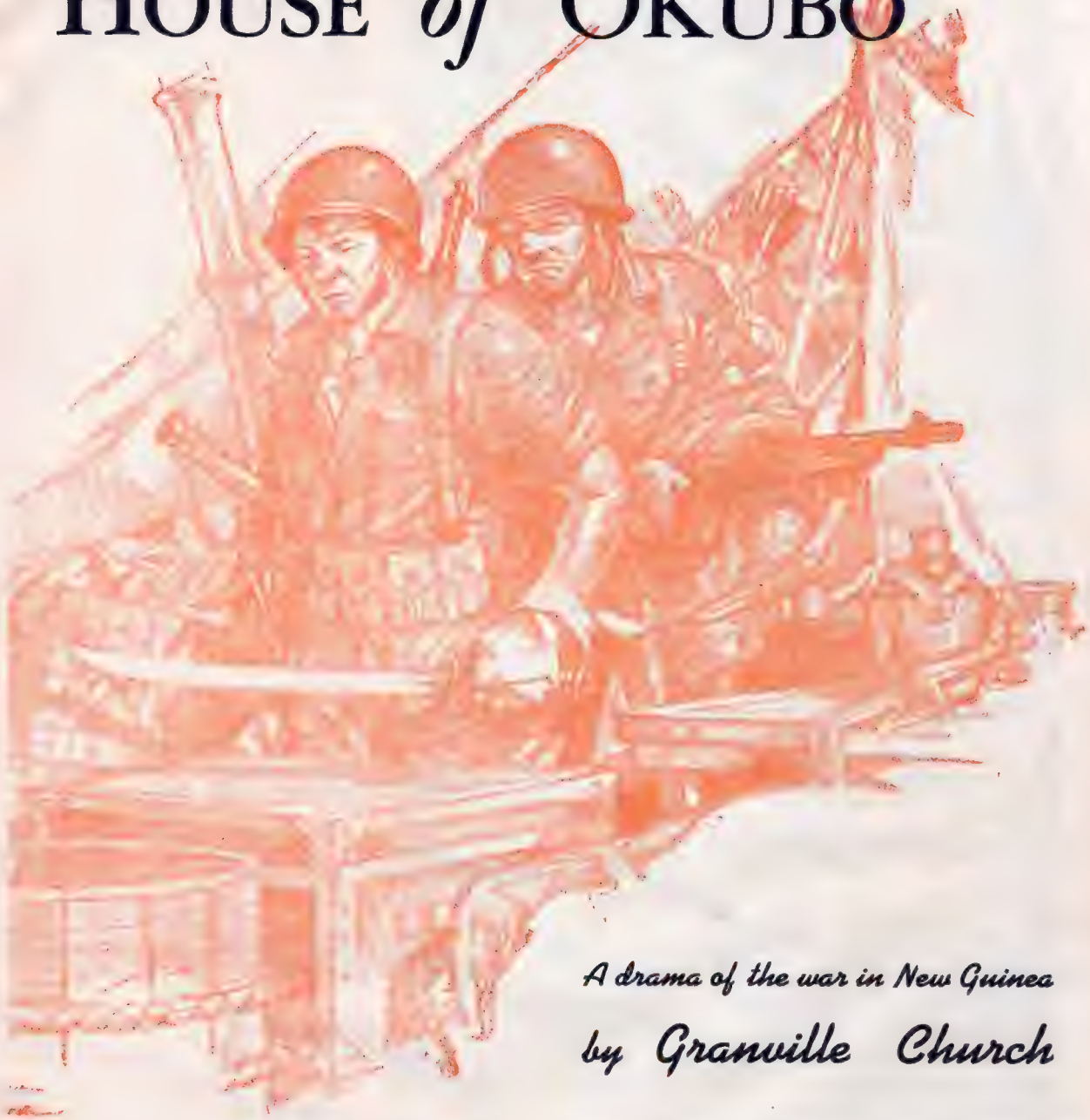
But of all his swords, there was one the old Marquis liked best; and even at seventy-four, without the strength to use it had there been the fantastic need, he wore it on ordinary days at home. He loved the feel of it at his side, loved to fondle it.

It was a short sword, a *Sayamaki-no Koshi-katana*, hardly more than an oversize dagger, but a work of art. Its sheath and hilt were heavily lacquered in red. The important points, the tips and the edges where sheath and hilt joined, were covered with black horn. A decorative button on the hilt, and a hook to hold the sheath fast to his belt in case he wished to draw the sword with one hand, were of *shakudo*, a combination of gold and copper. Its blade was signed by Bizen Masamitsu, in the Second Year of Ko-an, 1362 A. D. A splendid piece it was, descended in the family.

Now, the Marquis Okubo had many swords, but only one son. And that son had not yet given the family an heir. This alone didn't worry the old man too much. He hadn't reached that serious point himself until rather late in life. Yet it was risky in this case; for



HOUSE *of* OKUBO



A drama of the war in New Guinea

by Granville Church

now the son, who commanded a body of troops seasoned in South China, was home only for a brief rest before taking on a new and dangerous locale across many miles of treacherous seas.

Suppose—suppose. . . . He himself was now too old.

But his son's departure required a gift. It seemed fitting to the old man that the two things he prized most, his short sword and his son, should be joined as one. What greater sacrifice could he make?

So, on the eve of embarkation, the old Marquis went to his son. Without a word—or scarcely that, for the Japanese drown each other in words and hisses—without a word about the sword, however, for he couldn't quite trust himself, the old man took it from his belt and held it out with a hand that trembled. For if anything should happen to that sword—yet what could happen?

Young Kosai Okubo took the sword and held it reverently. Followed a flood of self-deprecations, protests, honorifics. He ended in a sacred promise:

"I shall wear it always. It will be my inspiration! It will never leave my side, day or night. I shall cover it with glory. I shall pass it on to my son, and he to his."

The next day the sword sailed for the Southwest Pacific. Colonel Kosai Okubo had a glorious mission there.



Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

Those insane Americans! They *were attacking* him!

All the ocean in that part of the world was dotted with islands, big and little. Whoever held them held the enemy at bay. Carriers were vulnerable, as Japan had discovered to her cost; but islands could never be sunk. Nearly every spit of land that could be leveled was a potential air-base for the raiding of the enemy. Many had snug harbors. Some were excellent steppingstones, perfect depots for the gathering of men and material for further hops southward—or northward.

These islands were Japan's first line of defense. For if carriers were vulnerable to Japan, they were also vulnerable to the stupid white man. So from where, unless from these islands, could America menace the homeland itself? Not from Alaska, which was too far, and weather conditions a hindrance. Besides, the fools had let them take Kiska, which cut that threat in two. Not from Siberia. Russia had her hands too full to suffer war at her back door. Not from China. Japan had blockaded China's every entrance, and supplies could not get to her in sufficient quantities for sustained attack upon Japan.

Ah, but they had conducted their campaign brilliantly! The white man was stymied.

FOR already Japan held most of these islands. Thousands of them! Had they not bought all of Micronesia for nothing but a stab in the back—Germany's back, at Tsingtao, in 1914? Oh, they were on their toes when the first World War broke. They knew cheese from wheat—then. And the decadent, wishy-washy democracies, incapable of decisive coördination, quarreling among themselves over the pettiest details, had given them the leisure to fortify and develop these islands. Hah!

Further, since that more recent stab in the back, America's back, at Pearl Harbor, she'd seized enough more to make her position impregnable—the East Indies, the Philippines, strategic Guam and Wake, and the bulk of Melanesia—New Guinea, the Bismarcks, the Solomons. . . .

Ah, the Solomons! When Colonel Okubo thought of the Solomons, he scowled fiercely, though the Solomons was not his province. There Japan had met her first real defeat, and the Colonel couldn't stand defeat. Japan had lost the southern Solomons. That was a bitter pill.

More than the humiliation, however, this jolted her plans; for her over-all strategy was still what it had been from the first. To ring Australia, the logical base and springboard for the white man, and cut communications with the western world, while she, Japan, developed the riches

she'd seized. Australia was the only spot where sufficient strength could be built up for an assault against the beautiful new Japanese Empire. So Australia had to be encircled, the supply-routes cut.

And quickly! Already too many convoys were getting through, even via the infinitely longer route around Oceania. Bigger and bigger convoys. Supplies, munitions, machines. Soldiers, airmen, marines; already Japan had felt the sting of those soldiers, airmen, marines. These convoys must be stopped.

This is where Colonel Kosai Okubo entered the picture. In a small way. Any grand action is only the result of many small actions, and in the grand scheme of things the taking of a spot like Port Moresby, whatever the cost might be, is only a small action.

And that was the plan. What consternation it would throw in the camp of the enemy!

The Colonel's convoy had luck. Others had been lost in those very waters, torn to pieces. Plenty of ships had carried the rising sun flag to the bottom. But it wasn't all luck on the Colonel's side. He waited for favorable weather, overcast or squally or foggy, even though it lost some days to do so. He dashed across the open stretches by night, and by day clung to harbors or inlets or a shoreline good for beaching if necessary. And by luck and finesse and good management the convoy got through to the New Guinea coast.

The strength of his mission was in the very audacity of it. Who would expect an attack on Port Moresby, with so many spots on the Papuan Peninsula in Allied hands? The white man called the jungle and mountains impassable, but the Japanese knew better. The white man played war the conventional way, rolling up the opposition piece by piece. Even now they did this, after modern war had shown them how to bypass! No, Port Moresby was not impregnable. The Japanese would show their enemies a thing or two there in tactics.

Then their very daring caught up with them. On the day of debarkation, late in the day luckily, when the last remnants of the eight troopships and the four supply ships were being unloaded, the convoy was spotted by a scouting Catalina. *Aiee!*

The Colonel at once called for a fighter umbrella from Lae and Salamaua, yet before they could reach the scene, the convoy was being bombed and the scampering vessels sunk. Ack-ack from their cruisers and destroyers was of little use—those valuable cruisers and destroyers were being sunk too. What Zeros reached the scene were outclassed. The wicked enemy had complete superiority in the air. Until night fell.



"I got to get back at the old man for those stories about the Meuse-Argonne."

But Colonel Okubo was an infantryman. He was not daunted. He had his men ashore and most of his equipment, and by brilliant generalship got them scattered and hidden from the air before morning. The one bad feature of it was that his position now was known. Should the enemy guess his purpose—

Well, he could take care of that. Original plans had called for hitting overland at once to take Moresby from the rear. Once in position he would call for his waiting air support and have Port Moresby before the white man knew what was happening.

NOW he must alter these plans. He would establish, or pretend to establish, a camp here on this coast, to lull the enemy into thinking this spot their objective. He would leave a skeleton crew to make a show of fortification and invite American bombs —and how the white man loved to drop bombs, even on dummy airplanes, imitation hangars, false barracks!—and the Colonel would slink into the jungle with the rest of his men and be at the outskirts of Port Moresby before discovered. Not for nothing had they spent long years of "commercial" exploration here. They knew what routes over the mountains would take their small tanks and field-pieces.

But this change required time, and time was precious. And surprise of surprises, before he could get it into operation and be on his way, the Americans had dropped one battalion from the air, to cut him off and hem him down to the sea.

The insolent fools! Did they think one battalion equipped by air, sufficient to withstand the number of troops they had seen to land, troops trained for this kind of fighting and fully equipped by sea-borne transport?

Here was more time lost, for he must first wipe out these American idiots playing at soldiery. Very well. So he gave his orders.

"Infiltrate one battalion to ambush and snipe while you maintain a scattering frontal fire to keep them spread out." This would wipe them out cheaply, man by man.

One of his majors hissed politely. "Would the honorable Colonel think me ungracious to suggest a larger force, a more concentrated attack?"

The honorable Colonel sneered. "Would you seize a saber to kill a mosquito? There is but one battalion there, Americans at that. One company will do it."

But it didn't. Only part of the company got past the American outposts, and only part of those who did came back. It seems the Americans themselves knew how to ambush and snipe and how to place machine-guns rather strategically

To add to the Colonel's annoyance, the Americans impudently pushed forward some few hundred yards. They had to retire that night to their original lines, but it wasn't because they were pushed back. Their new position was too exposed.

"Send in two battalions to infiltrate and cut them to pieces," was the Colonel's snarling order on the second day.

It still didn't work. Once more the Americans pushed forward, though they once more retired, come night.

The Colonel during this stage of the game had been operating by remote control. The Japanese held the littoral and the first range of hills. The bulk of the Colonel's men were on the seaward slopes building a camp to divert future American attention, and the Colonel was managing this job and the organization of the mountain and jungle hike to Port Moresby, no mean task in itself.

ACROSS the jungle valley not more than half a mile wide the Americans held the second ridge. It was just too far for effective fire had it been open ground, but the slopes were thickly clad and the ridges hardly less so. Either side had to work by feelers. All they knew was each other's strength and general position. Mortar fire was blind. The Japanese heavy guns were useless except as noisemakers.

The Colonel now took charge himself and moved his headquarters to the valley slope. He reviewed the situation. So they couldn't infiltrate. So the Americans were smarter than he'd thought. Well, he had other tricks in his bag.

"We stab at the left center and left flank," snapped the Colonel to his officers, "then attack on the right flank and encircle them."

The only trouble with this scheme was that it too didn't work. Still the Americans stood. They had proven smarter, were proving tougher than Colonel Okubo had given them credit for being.

He called his staff together that night.

"This delay endangers our whole project," he crackled and snapped. "We are losing valuable time and using up matériel we will need later. I do not expect miracles but I want this opposition wiped out at once. We will give them full-scale battle. Tomorrow we use the entire force and attack at dawn over the whole front. Not one enemy must remain to spy upon our further movements."

And he got down to details of sectors, paths of advance, fire-power, and the such.

Then he retired to his own green tent in its own green bower. He slept well for a few hours. It was still dark when his orderly called him in time for morning prayer, a quick meal—in kimono—and half an hour to dress. The Colonel was a meticulous dresser, even in the field. Over his uniform he fastened his swords—the *Itomaki-no-tachi,* the long sword for real battle service, and the *Sayamaki-no Koshi-katana,* the short sword which had been his father's favorite.

He glanced at his watch. Zero hour approached. The sky at his left was turning a shade lighter—the jungle, a Babylon of small noises through the night, seemed to hush itself for the big moment. His staff would be waiting, his clerks, orderlies, runners—each face an iron mask.

Then—his own mask slipped. His face convulsed with rage. Firing had broken out on the extreme right flank. A machine-gun, and it still lacked some few minutes to zero hour. The insubordinate fools!

More firing. On his left. Rifles began scattering lead, more machine-guns chattered, near and far. Someone would pay for this!

He hurried to join his staff, quick orders foaming, but pandemonium had broken loose. A rain of lead fell close, ripping through the trees. A machine-gun was barking not a hundred yards away, and it had a heavier sound than the crackle of Japanese guns! The truth hit him like a bolt of lightning. Those insane Americans! *They* were attacking *him!* The colossal stupidity of it! What glory could attach to conquering an army of idiots?

Alas, he had no time to follow up this speculation. He suddenly discovered that the stupid Americans were attacking in his rear, on his flanks, in front. *He* was surrounded! Even at that moment a few men tore through the bush on either side of him. Enemies! He ducked under cover just in time. When this spot of jungle had settled again he made a dash for his open-sided office tent—and hauled up short before breaking into the tiny hacked-out clearing. A group of Americans had found his headquarters and were gathering up his papers.

He slunk back into the heavy growth. More men, enemies, came tearing through the jungle, yelling. He hid until they passed, then made for his tent. Commotion to his rear, at his flanks, told him the action he had so carefully planned to smother the enemy was out of hand before it got started. His own guns were getting into action belatedly. They had a sharper sound than the bark of American weapons, but they were scattered and frantic and uncontrolled. As clear as a loudspeaker they told him his men were routed.

The disgrace of it! How could he face his superiors after this? Most horrible of all, he was alone, cut off from his men. He'd be captured. *Captured!* This was truly insupportable. Those wicked, insane, ignorant, barbarous Americans—lacking all knowledge of honorable warfare. . . . But there was one thing left.

HE must hurry. He hadn't much time. More men were tearing through the jungle bush. Any moment they would stumble onto his tent. He made a hurried ceremony before the small Shinto shrine he always carried with him in the field, ripped off his tunic, his shirt, opened his pants at the top to bare his stomach, grasped the handle of the sword he'd sworn would never leave his side, the sword he'd sworn to cover with glory and to pass on to his son and his son's son. . . .

Two American soldiers came crashing through the bush.

"Hey, Mac! Look! Hara-kiri! First time we've seen that. Left to right, then straight up. Jeez, what a way to die, all spilled out like that!"

But Mac was already poking through the tent for whatever he might find of value to the staff.

"I don't figure it." The first soldier stared and shook his head. "If they've got guts enough to make war, why haven't they enough to see it through? You'd think they'd even let themselves be captured, if it came to that, in the hope of escaping and fighting on. But no, not an officer surrenders. There must be something wrong in their make-up—"

"Look alive, you goon! We haven't got all day."

"I know, but look, Mac! Swords. Two of 'em. The big one's mine—I saw it first." He kicked the short sword free of the body, the better to see it. "Huh, the little one doesn't look like much, does it? You want it?"

"Bill! We're not on a picnic! Don't you see this guy was a colonel? That means he must have been in command. You know what it means to us if we get word to the Major. You want a pair of stripes, don't you? Then lend a hand."

Mac was wrapping odds and ends of the dead men's effects in the tunic.

"Okay, okay, but this is the first chance we've had at souvenirs like this, Mac. Look, I know what we'll do with the little one. We'll hunt up a long one for you; and this one—I'm sure we can get an okay to put it in the next mail. Our captain's a helluva good scout. We'll send it to the President. He likes gadgets on his desk. He can use it as a letter-opener, or a paperweight, maybe. Maybe it'll remind him we're still here, what there are of us, and that we need more men and planes and stuff."

A BEAR AND A BEARD; HOUN'-DOGS AND GAMECOCKS; RED-EYE VERSUS WHITE-EYE—THESE COMBINED IN A VERY AMERICAN COMEDY.



The Lily Belle Blues

by HERBERT RAVENEL SASS

IT'S probably true that the most important things in Uncle Ed Abbey's life at this time were his Brindled Beauties, his Venus Mugwumps, his beard and his grandniece, Lily Belle. The beard used to worry him quite a bit until the thirtieth day of October of that year. On that day Uncle Ed was paying one of his rare visits to Asheville. He was in a department-store on the main street when a sudden rain came up, and a summer lady in a big pink hat walked in and bought an umbrella. She slipped the black cloth cover off the umbrella, dropped the cover on the floor and went out into the rain, holding the umbrella low over her head.

Uncle Ed picked up the umbrella-cover and stood for a minute or two holding it in his hand, his little blue eyes blinking as they often did when an idea was getting hold of him. Then he took it to the slick-haired clerk behind the counter. "Mister," he said, "that female lady dropped this hyar thing on the flo' of yo' sto'. If you got no use for it, I figger I'll take it along with me."

The slick-haired clerk said, "Old-timer, you're welcome to it," and so Uncle Ed put it in his pocket. When he got back to his cabin high up on Caney Fork that night he took the umbrella-cover out of his pocket, opened it up about on a level with his waist, then raised it slowly so that as he raised it his beard went down into it. Uncle Ed was long and thin, and everything about him was long and thin, including his white beard. With a little help from his grandniece Lily Belle, the beard fitted down into the umbrella-cover quite nicely.

Uncle Ed was pleased as Punch about this. "Ho-ho, Lily Belle," he said, "this hyar's a plumb clever invention. No trouble now when I got to make a side-windin' shot. That ol' beard useter git tangled up in the hammer o' my rifle an' sometimes I'd pretty nigh miss. That's why I come so nigh to missin' Jed Mayfield that time over in Yancey County—you rec'lect my bullet jus' nicked a piece out o' Jed's ear. But I don't need to worry no mo'. This hyar beard-holder invention's done knocked that trouble clean into Kingdom Come."

Lily Belle (who always reminded Uncle Ed of a jar of honey because her hair was that color and her voice that sweet) smiled happily as she opened the door of the little iron stove to see whether the spoon-bread was baking properly.

"That's just fine, Uncle Ed," she said. "It was perfectly smart of you to think of it the minute the summer lady dropped the umbrella-cover in the store in Asheville. I declare to goodness, Gran'uncle, the older you get, the smarter you get. Don't know what I'm goin' to do with you by the time you get to be a hundred."

Uncle Ed laughed, "Ho-ho-ho, Lily Belle," and felt that the world was good—it was so dang' good, that when Lily Belle went out of the room for a minute, he stepped quickly to the safe where he kept two jugs, one of which

contained what he called his Red-eye and the other what he called his White-eye—both manufactured by himself at his little private still way up Caney Fork creek. He hesitated a moment, then took a good swig of the Red-eye, choked a bit, wiped his eyes, shivered violently and turned to find that the world was even better than he had supposed.

A delicious aroma filled the cabin, the smell of hot venison gravy to be poured over the spoon-bread as soon as it was ready. Uncle Ed sniffed it, grinned genially at Lily Belle, and started for the cane-bottomed chair at the right of the fireplace. He didn't aim entirely straight, however, and landed instead in the wooden-bottomed chair at the left.

Thoughts were now shooting through his mind at lightning speed, and all of them were happy thoughts. Lily Belle was purtier than ever; his game roosters of the Venus Mugwump strain could lick anything in the Blue Ridge Mountains; his Brindled Beauty bear-dogs were r'arin' to go, an' the bear season would open day after tomorrer. He wasn't much over seventy-five an' dang' nigh as spry as when he'd fit with Stonewall Jackson in Colonel Alfred Venus' regiment—it was Colonel Venus who had given him his first Mugwumps right after the war. Now that side-windin' shots (by which he meant quick wheeling shots to the left) wouldn't bother him any more, he expected to kill more bear this season than he'd ever killed in his life.

One trouble was that Musketeer was dead—Musketeer, the best bear-dog he'd ever had. The thought made a brief shadow on his happiness. But Lily Belle looked mighty purty, an' he was sure now that she must have given Park Squire a swift kick in the pants—Park hadn't been around for a week makin' eyes at Lily Belle an' arguin' for his fool ideas about breedin' two new strains o' gamecocks an' bear-dogs to be called the Lily Belle Blues an' Browns. Thinking of this and pulling his beard-holder off and on, Uncle Ed couldn't be sad long.

After all, Musketeer had been gettin' old, an' it was best for him to go quick like that, batted into Kingdom Come by old Bloody Ben's mighty forepaw. What made Uncle Ed really mad every time he thought of it was the fact that as he threw up his rifle for a side-winding shot at the bear, his beard had got tangled in the hammer so that he couldn't shoot. That couldn't happen again, though.

"Lily Belle," Uncle Ed said, "this hyar beard-holder o' mine is the best invention ever invented. Ol' Bloody Ben aint goin' to make a monkey o' me any longer. I'm a-goin' after that bear day after tomorrer, the fust day o' the huntin' season, an' you're goin' to dine



"You're goin' to dine on a rump roast off Bloody Ben," said Uncle Ed.

on the sweetest meat you ever tried to chaw—a hunk o' rump roast right off o' that ol' Bloody Ben's big fat—" Here Uncle Ed made a har'r'rumphing noise in his throat, and Lily Belle blushed and said, "Uncle Ed, you've been at that Red-eye jug, I'll bet a pretty."

Uncle Ed laughed and said yes, he'd had a little tech o' the Red-eye to celebrate his beard-holder invention. His Red-eye was only half as strong as his White-eye, he said, an' it made a man feel right pleasantly contagious an' might throw his timing off some, but it never did gormandize nobody. Then he jumped up and headed briskly for the door of the little room where he slept. He missed it by two feet the first time and by eighteen inches the second time, but a third attempt got him through.

Lily Belle nodded her honey-colored head and smiled as though pleased about something. She tiptoed to the safe where the two jugs stood on the top shelf and filled a large tin cup from the jug labeled Red-eye. Then she went to her own room, taking the brimming tin cup with her.

THREE hours after sunup next day, Uncle Ed sat up straight in his bed. "Sufferin' saints an' sinners!" he exclaimed. "Overslep' myself sump'n turrible. Must ha' been excited by that trip to Asheville an' that beard-holder invention." In a minute he was out of bed and, still swathed in the old yellow bathrobe that he used as a nightgown, he was pulling his pants on over his long thin legs when suddenly he stopped.

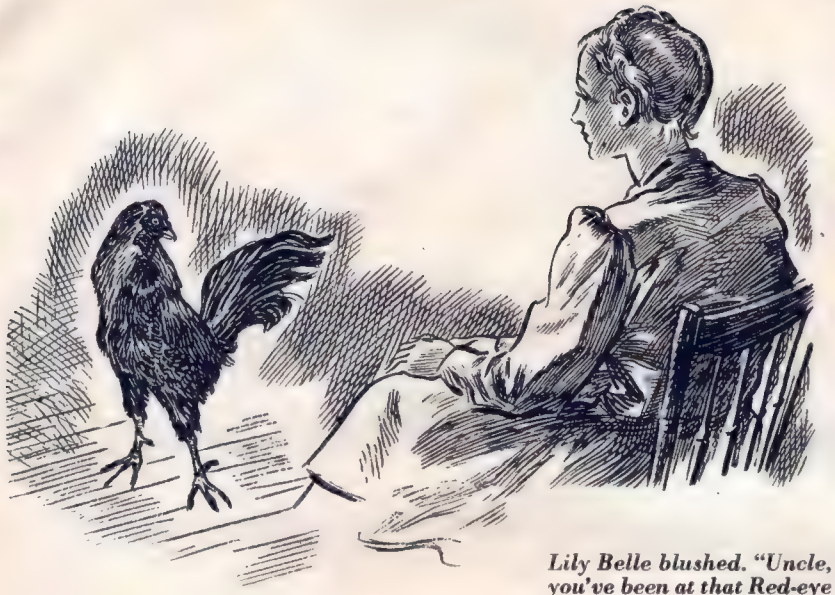
"Sufferin' saints!" he muttered. "That didn't sound like one o' my Venus Mugwumps! It sounded like a dag-gummed Arkansas Traveler!"

He stood with his trousers halfway on under the yellow bathrobe, his mouth open, his head tipped on one side, his beard—still encased in the black umbrella-cover—quivering with anxiety. In a minute he heard the thing again. It was just a cock crowing but at the sound of it a spasm shot across Uncle Ed's face, an expression of consternation mingled with rage.

"By criminy!" he cried. "I knowed it would happen. No pure-blooded Venus Mugwump ever crowed that-a-way. They's Arkansas Traveler blood in that rooster or I'll eat my boots. Doggone Park Squire's hide!"

He got his pants on under the yellow bathrobe, then his boots, and burst out of the door of his tiny bedroom into the larger middle room which served as dining-room, parlor and kitchen. Breakfast was smoking on the table, and Lily Belle, who had just put it there, greeted him with a smile like a summer sunrise. "I was just about to come and wake you up, Gran'uncle," she said. "You shore slept late this mornin'. Why, what in time's the matter?"

"Git out o' my way, chil'," Uncle Ed shouted, making for the door. "Park Squire's gone an' done it jes' like I knowed he would. He's put



Lily Belle blushed. "Uncle, you've been at that Red-eye jug, I'll bet a pretty."

Arkansas Traveler blood in my Venus Mugwumps. Gimme that double-edge ax, doggone it! I'm a-goin' to chop off his head."

"Whose head?" Lily Belle asked breathlessly.

"Why, that young rooster that's been a-crowin' outside the door," Uncle Ed shouted. "You can hear the Arkansas Traveler in his voice, doggone it! Listen."

They stood motionless listening, and after a moment they heard the cock crow again, apparently just outside the door. Uncle Ed jumped up and down, waving his arms—a remarkable sight in the yellow bathrobe with the black umbrella-cover encasing his beard so that he looked somewhat like a huge yellow-winged insect with a long black proboscis.

"See there now," he cried, "what did I tell you? No pure-blooded Venus Mugwump ever crowed that-a-way. You never heared ol' Cyclone, f'rinstance, sound like that. They's Arkansas Traveler blood in that thar bird, an' they's only one place it could ha' come from: It must ha' come from Park Squire's farm. He's been wantin' to cross-breed for a long time, an' now he's let some o' his Traveler cocks come over the ridge an' mingle with my birds an' spile my breed. I told him no a dozen times an' now, doggone him, he's done it. Gimme that double ax."

A knock on the front door of the cabin cut him short. "Now who in time can that be?" Lily Belle exclaimed in a tone that would have told anybody except Uncle Ed that she knew exactly who it was. "Come in," she added in a voice as sweet as a June wood thrush.

The door opened, and a smiling young mountaineer in green and black checked shirt, blue jean britches, and boots stood on the threshold. In the crook of his left arm this young man held a beautiful white gamecock with red shoulders like a pair of epaulettes; and as he entered the room, the gamecock lifted his head and crowed resoundingly. Uncle Ed clapped his hand to his forehead and fell back a couple of steps, then heaved a tremendous sigh of relief.

"So that's it, Park," he said. "It was this rooster o' yours that was doin' all that crowin'. Sufferin' saints, man, I thought it was one o' my cocks. I thought my Venus Mugwump breed had got spiled with Arkansas Traveler blood an' I was jus' a-cussin' you out because I thought one o' your Traveler cocks must ha' come over the ridge an' got in with my Mugwump hens."

Park Squire laughed. "I heared you, Mr. Abbey. I heared you through the door a-rantin' an' a-ragin' an' I heared you a-hollerin' for the double-edge ax so you could chop off his head. Well, Mr. Abbey, you were right about him havin' Arkansas Traveler blood all right but it wasn't one o' your cocks that was doin' that crowin'. It was this pure-bred Arkansas Traveler o' mine that I'm showin' you right now. I brung him over to show you because he's the purtiest I've ever raised an' I b'lieve when you see how purty he is you'll be willin' to make that cross with my Arkansas Travelers I've been wantin' you to make to improve your Venus Mugwump breed."

Uncle Ed jumped as though someone had stuck a pin in him. "Jus' wait a minute, Mr. Squire," he said, using the fancy language he generally used when he wanted to be sarcastic. "Jus' wait a minute, my dear sir, an' hold your rooster till I come back."

HE darted out of the door into the yard, and Park Squire immediately jumped across the room to where Lily Belle stood waiting and put his right arm around her in a hug that nearly took her breath.

"Honey," he said, when she had wriggled loose from him, "it's worked fine so far an' I've got one hug out o' it anyhow. An' I think he's gone to get Cyclone jus' as we figgered—I hope things'll happen the way you expect. But what in tarnation is that black thing a-hangin' from his chin, Lily Belle? I didn't know your gran'uncle wore a nightcap on his beard."

"That's so he won't have any more trouble making side-winding shots," Lily Belle told him. Park Squire looked puzzled, but there wasn't time for further explanation, for Uncle Ed came hurrying back into the room and he too had a gamecock in the hollow of his arm—a superb, flame-red, streamlined bird with brown breast and iridescent blue-black tail.

"Mr. Park Squire, Esquire," he orated, more sarcastic than ever, "you think you've got a purty cock in your arms an' when I see how purty he is you think I'll agree to the fool idee you've been tryin' to make me agree to for six months an' more—which fool idee is to cross your Arkansas Traveler cocks with my Venus Mugwump hens an' make a new game strain to be called the Lily Belle Blues. This is mighty nigh as fool as that other idee you been trying to make me agree to for a year an' more—which other fool idee is to cross your Redbone hounds on my Brindled Beauty bear-dogs an' make a new huntin' strain to be called the Lily Belle Browns."

Uncle Ed paused, looked down at the red gamecock he was holding and smiled a superior smile. "Well, Mr. Park Squire, Esquire," he continued courteously, "seein' as how we both got a gamecock in our arms, we'll talk about the fust idee fust. I'll admit that, far as I can see, your cock is a right purty-lookin' cock for a Arkansas Traveler. But I'm a-goin' to tell you sump'n you reely ought to know, my dear young sir. It don't make a bit o' diffrunce how purty a gamecock *looks*. Only thing that matters a dang is how purty he *fights*. An' I aim to



show you in about two shakes of a ground-squirrel's tail that when a Arkansas Traveler is so unfortch'nate as to have a little argyment with a Venus Mugwump, the result is jus' simply a forlorn contusion, as the feller says."

Uncle Ed stooped, placed the red gamecock on the floor at his feet, then stepped back quickly.

"Put your cock down, Mr. Park Squire," he cried. "Put him down right hyar on the flo' an' if ol' Cyclone don't knock the tar out o' him in one wag of a woodchuck's whiskers, I'll eat my boots."

A swift glance passed from Park Squire to Lily Belle and the girl's honey-colored head nodded slightly. Park cleared his throat.

"Course, Mr. Abbey," he said, "Cyclone's the best you've got. He's jus' about the best Venus Mugwump you've ever raised an' he's a seasoned cock with plenty of experience while this hyar Traveler o' mine is jus' a youngster. But all the same I'll go you. I'll ask you, Mr. Abbey, to watch my bird careful an' close. You'll see he's so fast on his feet that Cyclone won't be able to hit him."

He gave a flip of his arm and the white cock with the red shoulders fluttered to the floor.

He struck the floor crowing and he'd hardly landed when the Venus Mugwump came through the air like a streak of red lightning. The attack was so swift that even Uncle Ed was surprised—old Cyclone was sho'ly full o' pep this mornin'. Lily Belle, who knew that Cyclone was also full of something else, was dismayed as well as surprised.

An hour ago, in preparation for this moment, she had poured half a cupful of Uncle Ed's Red-eye down the Mugwump's throat. She had supposed—though Park Squire had been doubtful about it—that the Red-eye would have the same effect on Cyclone that it had on Uncle Ed. But now as the Mugwump shot through the air like a red cannonball, her heart was in her mouth.

Only for an instant, however; next moment she gave a huge sigh of relief. Cyclone's attack had been magnificent but it hadn't hit anything. It had missed the white Arkansas Traveler by at least a foot.

"Snufflin' snails!" Uncle Ed muttered, too dumfounded to swear accurately.

"Oh, boy!" Park shouted. "Did you ever see such footwork, Mr. Abbey? Why, that Traveler—" He stopped, because Cyclone was coming through the air again like a scarlet projectile. This time his aim was truer laterally but not vertically. He didn't shoot past on one side or the other but, instead of hitting the white cock, he landed wrong-side-up right in front of him. That was unfortunate because Arkansas Traveler was on top of him in a flash, raining blow after blow upon him with wings and spurs.

But Cyclone was game. The Red-eye was doing to him exactly what it did to Uncle Ed: he couldn't go where he aimed and his timing was completely ruined but he was as full of energy as a stick of dynamite. Again and again he rushed the Arkansas Traveler. Each time he missed but the action was so fast that his missing seemed to be due entirely to the white cock's marvelous side-stepping.

Uncle Ed looked on like a man dazed. Lily Belle, keeping carefully behind her granduncle's back, was jubilant. This was *her* plan, based on her observation of Uncle Ed after he'd had a swig of Red-eye, and things were going just as she'd told Park they would. Suddenly, as Cyclone was about to launch another rush, Uncle Ed stooped and picked him up.

"'Taint no use, old boy," he told the panting red cock, "you jus' can't hit him. That's the best footwork *ever* I see. Park Squire, you've done sold me on your idea about crossin' your Arkansas Travelers with my Venus Mugwumps to make a strain called the Lily Belle Blues. We'll breed a strain that'll hit like mine an' dodge like yourn an', by heck, we'll whip the whole dang' country."

He wagged his finger in the young man's face. "But when it comes to bear-dogs, now that's a teetotally different matter. I got no time for that other idee of yours to cross your Redbone hounds with my Brindled Beauties—"



A sound cut him short. Faint but distinct, it floated through the window of the cabin—the far-off musical belling of a pack of hounds on a hot trail. Uncle Ed looked hurriedly around him, then ran to the door, flung it open and stood listening. Park Squire strolled slowly across the room.

"What's the matter, Mr. Abbey?" he asked casually. "'Taint nothin' but my pack o' dogs runnin' a bear. My brother Clint an' old John Longhead, the Injun, took 'em out before sun-up this mornin'. Wouldn't wonder if they'd jumped Bloody Ben hisself."

Above the black umbrella-cover containing his beard, Uncle Ed's face became a dull crimson.

"Park Squire," he croaked, "I'll have the law on Clint an' John Longhead. Don't they know the bear season don't open till tomorrer?"

"No sir," Park answered, "you're wrong, sir. She's open today, sir. They shoved her up a day on account o'—on account o'—"

"On account o' next year being leap year," Lily Belle put in wildly.

Uncle Ed took this in slowly. It was almost as great a shock to him as Cyclone's failure to knock the Arkansas Traveler cold. But once he took it in he didn't waste any time. "Git out o' my way," he snapped at Park Squire and leaped across the floor. He snatched up his rifle from the corner where he kept it, rammed a handful of cartridges into the pocket of the yellow bathrobe, dashed out of the door and across the yard to the dog pen. The five brindled bear-dogs tumbled out, yipping with excitement.

Uncle Ed ran down the hill with the tails of the yellow bathrobe flying, his beard in its cloth cover streaming like a black burgee, and the Brindled Beauties dancing around him. The sound of Park Squire's pack was getting louder every minute. They were coming straight down the side of Stumphouse ridge and Uncle Ed judged from this that they really were on the trail of Bloody Ben himself because most bears prefer to run uphill and only a schemy scoundrel like old Bloody Ben would deliberately choose a downgrade. Bloody Ben had a scheme, Uncle Ed figured, and he thought he knew what it was.

Anyhow he had to take a chance on it because that was his only hope of getting a shot. So he angled off to the left while his dogs raced straight on toward the sound of Squire's pack. Ten minutes later Uncle Ed was crouching behind a rock where a shallow oak ravine led down from the ridge. He'd hardly got himself fixed there when he saw Bloody Ben coming down the ravine. And, as Uncle Ed had expected, Bloody Ben wasn't alone. In front of him raced a smaller black bear; and, wildly excited though he now was, Uncle Ed couldn't help grinning. Bloody Ben had worked the first half of his scheme all right; when the Squire pack had struck his trail, he had run straight to the lair of another bear, had flushed him up and kept him running along in front.

But he didn't know that Uncle Ed was waiting behind a rock with his rifle ready farther down the ravine. Or maybe in some mysterious way he did know. At any rate, he didn't come on past Uncle Ed's rock. Instead, he stopped suddenly and, making a big jump to the left, dashed away at right angles to his former course.

THIS was the second half of the trick but Uncle Ed hadn't foreseen that the big bear would pull it so soon. The other bear which had been running in front of Bloody Ben came straight on and Uncle Ed could have dropped him as easy as kiss-your-hand. But he didn't even look at him as he high-tailed past.

The old man was boiling mad at the trick Bloody Ben had played him. He jumped out from behind his rock and began to run. There might be a chance of turning the dogs on to Bloody Ben's trail if he could get to the spot before they did.

Before he could get there, though, he saw the dogs coming down the ravine—his own Brindled Beauties. Evidently they had cut in on the chase ahead of the Squire pack of Redbones. He yelled at them and waved his rifle



What made Uncle Ed mad was that his beard had tangled in the hammer so that he couldn't shoot.



Thirty feet ahead of the onrushing bear was Lily Belle.

Illustrated by Edward Shenton



wildly but at that distance they didn't even recognize the figure in the yellow bathrobe with a long black thing growing out of his chin instead of the familiar white beard. They ran past the spot where the big bear had leaped aside and raced on out of sight on the trail of the smaller bear exactly as old Bloody Ben had intended them to.

Uncle Ed swore till the air around him was not only blue but purple. If Musketeer had been alive and leading his pack Bloody Ben would never have put this trick over. Uncle Ed did some fast thinking. The Squire dogs would be along in a minute and he might turn them off on to Bloody Ben's trail.

Suddenly he saw what he thought was the first of the Squire dogs coming down the ravine. He couldn't see him plainly at first on account of the bushes and when, as the dog drew nearer, he did see him plainly, Uncle Ed nearly dropped in his tracks. The dog was Musketeer!

Uncle Ed's legs turned to rubber under him: he could feel the hair rise on the back of his head. He and Lily Belle had buried Musketeer with their own hands in the pasture behind the cabin four months ago, and here was Musketeer coming down the ravine. He recalled old tales of ghost dogs that scuffled up out of their graves and went hunting on black moonless nights and he felt aggrieved and injured because here he was face to face with one of these awful creatures in the broad light of day.

He knew what was going to happen. Musketeer's ghost wouldn't be less intelligent than Musketeer himself had been—old Bloody Ben would never fool this supernatural hunter. Sure enough, when Musketeer's ghost reached the spot where the big bear had jumped to the left, he seemed to know right away that something was wrong. Instead of continuing along the straight trail after the other bear, he began to cast around and circle. In less than a minute he picked up Bloody Ben's trail and bounded away on it.

Uncle Ed shivered and sat down weakly on a log. He wanted to follow that chase, but hunting with a dog he'd buried five feet deep with his own hands was a little too much for him. The Squire pack of Redbones went tearing past on the straight trail, none of them discovering Bloody Ben's trick. "Passel o' fools," Uncle Ed muttered, forgetting for the moment that his own Brindled Beauties had done exactly the same thing.

It was maybe ten minutes after this that he heard a sound behind him. He turned his head. Old Bloody Ben was coming straight for him. Evidently the big bear had doubled in the woods over to the left and was coming back toward Stumphouse ridge.

Uncle Ed, motionless in his yellow bathrobe on the log, was almost invisible in the yellow and brown autumn woods. Bloody Ben didn't see him. Uncle Ed realized if he didn't want to get run over by a five-hundred-pound bear he'd better do something quick. He jumped to his feet with a yell and tried to turn so that he could shoot, but his foot jammed in a laurel root, and Bloody Ben, startled by this apparition, swerved to the left up the ravine. Uncle Ed heard a shrill scream and there, he saw, in the ravine thirty feet in front of the onrushing bear, was Lily Belle.

It was one of the hardest side-winding shots he'd ever had to make—a shot sharp to the left when he couldn't turn his body on account of his jammed foot. It was just the kind of shot his beard used to ruin by getting tangled in the hammer of his rifle. But Uncle Ed laughed confidently as he swung his rifle to the left. His beard, encased in the umbrella-cover, didn't bother him a bit and he made the finest side-winding shot of his entire lifetime. Old Bloody Ben never knew what hit him.

FIVE minutes later they were all seated on the log—Uncle Ed, Lily Belle and Park Squire—while Musketeer's ghost sat on his haunches in front of them. "You see it was this way, Mr. Abbey," Park was saying: "old Musketeer had a sweetheart over at my place, a Redbone gyp named Lucy, and he used to come over the ridge to visit her at night. Well, he and Lucy got married but all the pups died except one. That one looked so exac'ly like Musketeer that I named him Musket."

He held out his hand to the big brindled dog sitting on his haunches. "Come here, Musket," he said, "—stan' up an' let Mr. Abbey get a good look

at you. . . . You see, sir, he's half Redbone, but you'd never guess it. He's Musketeer all over excep' maybe a trifle taller. He's got a Redbone's nose an' Musketeer's sense an' he's a grand bear-dog, sir. I knew if you could jus' see Musket work you'd let me cross some more of your Brindled Beauties with my Redbones to make a strain we'll call the Lily Belle Browns. That's why we got up this hunt a day ahead of the season."

Uncle Ed took his beard out of his beard-holder so that he could stroke it —a thing he liked to do in moments of emotion. "Park," he said, "when you skin that bear I want you to cut a big roast from his—" (here Uncle Ed made the har'r'r'rumphing noise in his throat) "an' bring it over to my house, an' you better put on yo' store clothes so you can stay for dinner. In fac', you may as well bring yo' grip-satchel 'cause if you figger on weddin' Lily Belle you'll jus' have to live in my house—I got no idee o' lettin' her go across Stumphouse ridge."

He stroked his beard thoughtfully and began to replace it in the beard-holder. His thoughts seemed far away. "I *did* see him work, Park," he said. "I *did* see Musket work on Bloody Ben's trail. An' I seen that Arkansas Traveler work too—fastest footwork ever I looked upon." At this Lily Belle's conscience pricked her and she was about to tell her granduncle how she had given a swig of Red-eye to Cyclone, the gallant Venus Mugwump, but Park put his hand over her mouth.

Uncle Ed continued as though talking to himself:

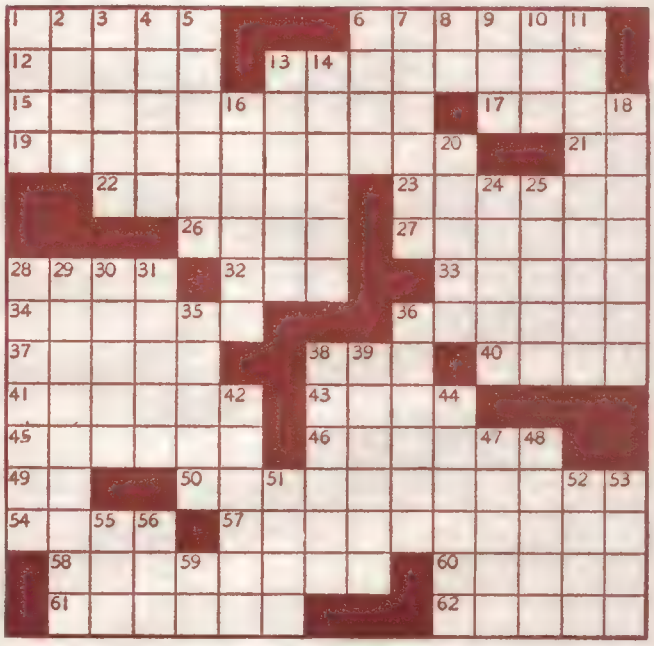
"Here's how we'll advertise 'em—*'The Lily Belle Blues an' Browns. Finest strain o' gamecocks an' bear-dogs in No'th Ca'liny. Cocks an' pups for sale by Abbey, Squire an' Co., originators an' breeders, Caney Fork, N. C., RFD 3. Prices thirty dollars per cock an' fifty dollars per pup. Send your order in now an' avoid the rush.'*"

Uncle Ed got up and started homeward, the bathrobe flapping around his legs and the beard-holder flying. Already the burden of wealth furrowed his forehead. "Doggone it," Lily Belle heard him mutter, "I never figgered I'd have to worry about income-tax, but it looks like I'll have to do a heap o' worryin'."

BLUE BOOK'S CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by Albert H. Morehead

This type of crossword puzzle is designed to offer a challenge for your imagination instead of a test of your vocabulary. That is to say, the difficulty is not in the words themselves, but in the definitions. The main types used are the anagram, the enigma, the hidden word and—for variety to keep you guessing—some straight dictionary definitions. (Solution on page 122.)



ACROSS

1 It's tough when you are in the hash
6 Furniture fashioned of tissue
12 In this age you look at and see marble
13 The church arms with spare TNT
15 Returns and turns over sirens
17 If I were you, a duet would be our daily fare
19 Aged and thru—according to the aviation enthusiasts
21 Take a hem
22 These R A mess
23 O clear (yet muddled) voice
26 Darn it, I'm almost tardy getting back
27 Ye Cods! I've been trapped
28 Kay's out to deliver knocks against the pros
32 This letter shows the mark of a woman
33 Exhalations make gentle breezes
34 Robin Hood's composer started back when summoned
36 Rattie looking in crumpled clothes
37 Eve was a party in Stevenson's initial efforts
38 Obese president attempted comeback — didn't quite make it
40 "There's a divinity that shapes our —— rough . . . ." *Shakespeare*
41 Curb inclinations
43 When I guarantee double you' eggs will come right across
45 Please arrange the rest
46 A A. Milne portrayal of an ancillary character
49 As backwards also expresses this
50 Infers dense, yet scattered, culture
54 Home of 52 Down
57 Gather with H in but C gone out
58 The confused harp, I see, is a hypocrite
60 Rue loss of revenues—a number of them
61 Best four out of seven—see, sir?
62 R. C. Church council

DOWN

1 What a tough way she had about 'er
2 He gets things ripe—then a man makes him the boss
3 Speaks calmly? No, *vice versa*
4 Locomotive power
5 He'd be around der German and become regimented
6 You hit what's called a snag
7 Do shun shoes
8 Ran me out, and remains
9 Our end is to make him detour
10 Log is a written record; tome is the contents of a book; and thet is a name
11 Ready? Let's turn the scale
13 Stumble—and break your crowns—on a stair
14 Finally ousts them, which stirs them up
16 Trapped in redans
18 Steer steamship through the locks
20 Entertain, with the nine who dropped in
24 It's keen to have an attractive ensemble
25 Shepherd in *As You Like It*
28 A cretin always acts positive
29 Suppose he ever stops?
30 A romance is mostly love
31 On their knees in the Greek theatre
35 Leaders losing as they age
36 Apologist for the ornate
38 *In fine,* am starving
39 Envisage a punishing campaign—the center is lost and the rest scattered
42 Pieces of eight
44 The great open spaces I'd found in the West
47 Starts like an angel, then loses his temper
48 The French final hail—that's not the French way to depart
51 Dig a trench to seek the hidden fossil
52 Not neat enough for Annette's; try Anna;
53 And here she is again, transmuted and transmitted,
55 And you'll find her here, too.
56 If you pitch in
59 George Sixth

The AFFAIR of the

A Story of



THE headquarters of Quest, Incorporated, were in New York. When Cooper walked into the private office of Steven Luring, the president, he had no idea of what was coming.

"Morning," barked Luring. "Sit down. You speak Italian?"

"Fairly." Cooper eased his long length into a chair and waited.

"You're good; you were an Army interpreter in Italy, during the war, durn you! We've been retained in a curious case. How'd you like to go to Naples?"

The muscles twitched in Cooper's lean, hard cheek.

"All right."

Luring eyed him attentively, then leaned forward.

"Speaking as a friend, Robert, I wish to hell you'd show some enthusiasm sometime over something! Your work is A-1; you're one of our best men. Yet you act as though nothing in life held much interest for you."

"Nothing much does," said Cooper. "Are we discussing me or the firm's business?"

Luring flushed slightly, but fought back his resentment. It was Cooper's way; he stood off intimacy like a stone wall, although genial enough ordinarily. Something had happened during the war, said rumor, to sour his life. He never discussed it. But he was far too valuable for Luring to offend by pressing the subject.

"Okay," the president rejoined, and extended an envelope. "Here are the papers in the case—all the information we have—with expense money and a ticket on tonight's Mediterranean Constellation. Draw on the firm as needed, and good luck."

"Thanks," said Cooper, and left.

Thus began the case known in the records of Quest, Inc., as File 13N-621. Here is the file; you can see the number for yourself. It begins with thirteen, and the figures add up to thirteen. Cooper read the number on the envelope as he left the office, and smiled bitterly. Naples! Yes, he would take it on. He had never expected to see Naples again. Now he was going, at his own choice. It gave him the gloomy satisfaction of one who prods deeply into an old wound and he welcomed the hurt, as though to prove that he could stand up to it like a man. Thirteen? He was not superstitious.

He had been stationed there many months, while the Army from North Africa was fighting up to Rome and beyond to the war's end. That was long ago, it seemed, though not so long in time. And he, who had lost everything, was now going back as the agent of the world-wide firm that looked up lost people.

In those dark days after the war the services of Quest, Incorporated, were in high demand. It was in no sense a detective firm; it had wealth and great influence in many quarters, and its *raison d'être* was to find lost persons. Everywhere were war-tossed populations as never before in the world's history. Refugees, deportées, victims of fanatic hate—sorrow clouded the world from Norway to Manila.

Quest, Incorporated, with its skilled brains, its influential connections, its experts and unrelenting energy, had accomplished some remarkable findings both in people and in things. It was Quest that recovered the treasures of ancient Greece, looted by the Nazis; it was Quest that found the lost Rothschild heir and brought him back from the hideous fate to which Hitler had doomed him. Quest, too, had dug out more than one supposedly dead man from forgotten prison-camps in Russia or in the ruins of what had been Japan.

But not even Quest, with all its far-flung tentacles, could reach into the human soul and repair the loss that had stricken Robert Cooper.

It was not until he was aboard the Constellation and actually in air over the Atlantic that Cooper pried into the envelope Luring had handed him. He had not wanted to think of Naples yet; he shrank from it now, as he emptied the envelope on the table before him. He knew the city would be tremendously different, of course. He remembered it as fresh from the terrific bombings that had destroyed factories and waterfront and harbor and shipyards. All that would be gone now; the new Italy, free from graft and terror and tyranny, had flung itself into reconstruction and was becoming the earthly paradise of Europe.

Cooper fingered the letters and clippings and photographs, and saw them not. Instead, he saw the terraced villa on the long slope of Posilipo, and the eyes of Donna Cecilia smiling above the wondering, questing baby face of their son. He could hear her trying to speak the unfamiliar name, Bobby. . . . That was his last sight or sound of them. The news had reached him at Rome; both were enfolded in the outbreak of war-bred plague at Naples.

Her father, that bitter, implacable old man, had written him of it. How the Marchese had hated him! Better dead than married to him, a soldier, an American invader, had said the old man. . . . Well, that was wa-

TWO THIRTEENS

"Quest, Inc.," by Gordon Keyne



ter under the bridge. Cooper stirred restlessly and picked up the papers before him.

"I can look him in the eye now, and feel sorry for him, poor old fool!" he muttered. "Now let's see what's here."

Still he could not. The old Marchese had done the decent thing, had sent him a photograph of the double grave and the markers. He himself had never seen it, because, directly after getting the news, he had gone under with typhoid; next thing he knew, he was heading for home on a hospital transport. *Home!* The word tore at him mockingly. Bobby would have been four this spring. . . .

FROM the window, he could see a whole fleet of freight transports, a convoy of the big planes bound for Africa in charge of an Air Control escort. They waggled wings at the Constellation in greeting, and she swept on past in her silent majesty,

He crossed the river and mounted into the hills. Only three miles to go!

pursued by their unmuffled roar. Cooper bent his attention on the papers before him and settled to work.

He was to find the Principe di San Severo. A prince, the last of his line. Here was a photo taken in the final year of the war. It showed a little Blackshirt—yes, four years old then, should be eight or nine now—standing at salute, complete with all the trappings from dirk to imitation medals, an ironic emblem of a dead and forgotten Fascist phantasm.

THE clippings and papers gave the story: The Prince had vanished at the time of the war bombings, and his mother had been rendered a lifelong invalid. Search had been long and fruitless. The boy's father had been an ardent Fascist, a leader in the famed march on Rome under Mussolini, and commander of a tank division in Africa, where he was killed. The San Severo wealth was gone, but rich lands remained just north of Naples at Aversa. There was the story; just another child vanished, one of thousands vanished in those dark days. A prince—more irony.

A hopeless errand, as Cooper plainly saw; therefore he warmed to it. The conquest of the impossible captured his interest as nothing else could do. Identification marks? None of note; a brown mole between the shoulders. Worse and worse! Then a paragraph clipped from an Italian paper caught his eye:

> It is possible that the child was killed during the savage anti-Fascisti riots that caused so much loss of life and property in Naples at the close of the war. His father, the late Principe, was bitterly hated in many quarters because of his ardent Fascism.

Possible, yes; not at all likely. The Italians love children. Not even in those desperately murderous days when the hated Fascist party members were hunted down and killed in the streets by a maddened populace, would children have been harmed. Cooper went over the papers repeatedly and found nothing to afford the slightest clue. So he put them all away, pulled his hat over his eyes, and went to sleep. . . .

Before Naples, the Constellation was making only one stop, Lisbon. It was mid-morning when she swooped down on the broad reaches of the Tagus; she had to drop mail and passengers, take on others, and refuel. Cooper was thinking of going ashore for half an hour, when he was summoned by the radio-phone. He switched in the instrument by his seat, and found it to be a call from the Quest office in Rome.

One secret of the success of Quest, Inc., was its intensive action. When it took on a case, its entire organization centered on that case, if necessary. A field agent, such as Cooper now was, had behind him unlimited resources and influence; seldom was he a lone wolf unless he so desired. The Rome manager had called Cooper with a bit of information.

"It may be a clue, although mighty indefinite. Simply that a couple of years ago a boy answering the description of San Severo was seen on the highway outside Caserta, twenty miles north of Naples. Some friend of the family recognized him, but lost him again. Shall we send you a guide who knows the district?"

"Thanks very much," said Cooper, "but I know it quite well, or used to. I'll manage."

"Okay, then. I suppose you know that two men, at different times, who were investigating the affair, were shot?"

"No!" said Cooper in surprise. "Nothing was said about that in the papers given me."

"There was no ostensible connection in either case; both were supposedly accidents. But each happened between Naples and Caserta. Thought I'd mention it, just in case. The mother lives in strict retirement at the Villa Riva, part of the family properties near Aversa."

"Yes, I have that," said Cooper. "Thanks a lot!"

Caserta again! He thought once more of the case number—File 13N-621. Two thirteens. Did it mean anything? The devil! Donna Cecilia came from Caserta; her father, that bitter old man, still lived there, if he was still alive. Caserta! Yes, he knew it well enough. It was there both she and the boy lay buried.

Two prior investigators shot? Well, they had not belonged to Quest, Inc. —besides, that had been during the chaotic times in the first post-war months. Now it was different; the new Italy had risen from her ashes with glorious promise. Her sons had not died by the hundred thousand; instead, they had surrendered and been repatriated, and she could smile again. No more ambuscades, banditti, internal dissension and murders! To his own surprise, Cooper found himself looking forward almost eagerly to his mission. . . .

Lisbon was full of delays; something had gone wrong with the oxygen chargers, and there was nothing to do but walk about the dreary gray city and wait. This delay, however, had one great compensation; because of it, they reached Naples at sunrise instead of in the night hours.

Shadowed by Vesuvius and its floating vapor, the city lay white along the azure water. The great Constellation dropped through the freight transport lanes, where a fleet of roaring Capronis were winging south to Sicily, and on down past anchored markers to the pleasure lanes, with gay little sports-craft darting about like moths —on down toward the landing, and circled there until an Imperial Airways giant cleared for Cairo. The vast new system of docks and shipyards and air bases drifted past below; the entire waterfront was strange to Cooper, replacing the ruined, bomb-shattered wreckage of war days with life and activity.

So, with the sun over Vesuvius, he came ashore and was taken to the magnificent structure that occupied the site of the old Hotel Royal. A bath and a shave, and he loafed about the streets, getting the feel of things Italian once more, and dropped into the Gambrinus for lunch; it was the same old oval room crowding the little street. Then he saw about renting a car, for he had resolved to be off for Caserta early in the morning.

If Naples had changed, the people had not. Neapolitan caution had to know all about him and his object before he could rent an old pre-war Fiat; even when he gave the hotel manager as a reference, consent was slow to come. When he came back to the hotel, he sought the manager, asking the reason for this caution. The manager shrugged.

"Signor, in the old days it was the Mafia. Now there is such unrelenting hatred for the Fascisti and all connected with them, that it amounts to a sort of confraternity of the people. The dealer telephoned me, and I had to give him all kinds of information and assurances about you. This underground feeling is very strong. What would you? Mussolini ruined our country, and those who followed him must suffer for it."

Cooper smiled; but later on, he remembered.

WITH morning, he was off, by way of the Capuan gate and Aversa, following the road leading through the rich Campagna to Caserta and the foothills. He was amazed by the difference in the country, for Naples had mushroomed all over the back spaces; the new factories and airfields alone must have doubled the size of the city, until the old hill towns were now no more than suburbs.

The ancient Fiat clattered through olive and lemon groves into Aversa, then struck up for Caserta—Casa Erta, the Gloomy House. Well-named, he thought as he passed the great Bourbon palace, the Versailles of Italy; he was not interested in that vast folly of ancient kings. Leaving his car, he wandered into a chemist's shop, bought a few odds and ends, and took one of the chairs.

Illustrated by Maurice Bower



"I shall hate you while there is life in me," said the Marchese.

Here, at least, Italy had not changed; the unofficial small-town club held forth as of yore, half a dozen men sitting about and gossiping. So the signor spoke Italian—more, even the hill dialect? A marvel! Here with the American Army during the war, yes. . . . They were friendly, garrulous, unreserved. The old chemist Cooper had known was dead now. But when he broached a name, the name of his former father-in-law, they looked one at another.

"The old Marchese d'Arpaja?" replied a graybeard. "Ah, there is a withered branch of the old days for you! Still alive, they say; one does not know. Crippled, I heard a few years ago. His estates gone, he disappeared."

"I saw him two years ago," said another, "on the road above Caserta Vecchia—the old town. He could barely walk; he shambled like a crab, but was fierce as ever. Eh, they had pride, those of the old Arpaja house! There was sadness in his latter days."

The talk shifted away, to Cooper's relief. He asked where he might stop for a few days; perhaps with some family? He did not relish the tourist hotels.

The matter was discussed gravely; it was agreed that the wine-merchant Marcantonio Popone was the man to seek, if the signor did not mind a bit of a climb. Up past Caserta Vecchia by the valley road toward San Lencio. A white house close to the road; one could not miss it. The signor would not make the error of mistaking Popone for a wine-seller, of course; a merchant in wines was a very different thing. Cooper assured them that he was aware of the distinction, thanked the company, and departed.

He arranged to leave his car here. Bag in hand, he struck off by the little road that crossed the river and mounted into the hills; he had only three miles to go. He passed the old town, with its grand church and ruined, deserted buildings, relics of old palaces, and was soon engulfed in loneliness and rocky desolation. Vineyards climbed the hill slopes; cottages slumbered here and there under giant fig-trees; and at last the white house came into sight ahead.

It was noon, and he struck the whole family gathered. Here was Marcantonio himself, a brawny ruffian in looks with piratical mustachios and a keen, cold eye, but hearty enough; a man of forty-odd who had served in Libya. His buxom wife Nella, with a babe of two, a brown clear-eyed boy of seven or so, gnarled old Sor Nicolo his father, and his carter Ruffo, a stringy, shifty-eyed man in his fifties.

Cooper sat down with the family to *polenta* and wine and bread, made an excellent meal, and ended by renting a chamber under the eaves for a few days. It seemed Marcantonio favored Americans; had they not destroyed the Fascisti? He growled curses in his mustache at the very name of Mussolini.

DURING the next four days Cooper settled to a routine of keeping his ears open and his mouth shut. He climbed the hill paths, wandered down to Caserta, saw one or two men whom he had known in the old days but who did not know him now, out of uniform, and visited all the farms he could reach in the vicinity. He was in no haste, he had found pleasant quarters, and was well aware that he could hope for nothing from more direct methods.

He learned that Marcantonio had once enjoyed a flourishing business in Naples until Fascisti racketeers ruined him, and was now building life anew here in the hills, and making a fair job of it. The American perceived that this brawny, lusty exterior hid a man of ruthless nature and iron will. Ruffo he judged to be an evil rascal. Old Sor Nicolo, gray and warped with years though he was, had the same hard and indomitable character as his son. The boy, named for the grandfather, was a charming little fellow, and Cooper struck up a firm friendship with him.

On the fourth day, by sheer luck, he learned that he was on the right trail. He had dropped down to Caserta on certain sad business of his own, and stopped in a wineshop for a glass. The shopkeeper and another local man were discussing him; he spoke Italian, they knew, but they did not dream that he spoke the local dialect they were using.

"Oh, an American," said the shopkeeper, "pretending that he is here for his health."

Cooper pricked up his ears, as the other man laughed.

"Not by any chance, another one looking for a mole between the shoulders?"

"Who knows? I have heard something about it," was the reply. "It is his business if he smells the trail too far and gets his nose burned."

No more was said. Cooper paid for his drink, and walked across the round *piazza* and on to the church, thoughtfully. Was the whole countryside leagued to keep secrets? Very possibly. If the boy Prince of San Severo were in this locality, everyone



"Up the valley toward San Lencio!" Cooper said. "Keep Francesco safe; I'll meet you there."

might be aware of it and no hint get out.

In the cemetery behind the church he found—and did not find—what he sought. The grave was there; the grim old Marchese had buried her under her maiden name, *Donna Cecilia Marie dei Segni d'Arpaja.* There was the gravestone as in the photograph Cooper had received. But as he stood with bared head, staring at it, he suddenly wakened to the lack of an accompanying grave or headstone; there was none—had been none. Yet it had shown in the photograph!

He examined the place more closely. Other graves of the family pressed closely upon hers, but not the one he sought. No, by heavens! The boy was not buried here at all! This discovery stupefied him, waked him from grief, sent him away wondering. The flowers he had meant for both graves went to the one. He resolved to find her father at once. And that evening at dinner he asked the question that started so many things.

"An Army friend of mine, who married a young lady from this district, has given me a commission to her father. Do you know where I can find the Marchese d'Arpaja?"

There was a brief silence about the table, until the boy Nicolo piped up excitedly:

"Il Jettatore! The old man in the chair who casts the evil eye! The Marchese!"

Marcantonio aimed a buffet at the boy. Cooper caught his arm; for an instant he met the angered glare, eye to eye, and smiled.

"Peace, friend! Spare him for his honesty. I mean the old man no harm. He is somewhere in this district—"

He broke off, astonished by the fury he read in the man's face. But Marcantonio, in turn, was astonished by the grip of this American. He rubbed his wrist and grunted.

"I must think about it. I would not bring evil upon an old man."

"No evil, but a message of forgiveness and peace from his son-in-law in America."

"Oh!" Marcantonio hesitated, and caught the eye of Ruffo the carter. A

silent message passed between them. "That must be the old man who lives at the Forcella farm up the valley. The children say he is a *jettatore,* who casts the evil eye. I do not know."

Cooper went up to his room, later, to lie in the darkness and wonder. So it was known, somehow, that he had come in quest of the lost heir of San Severo—no telling how much these countryfolk knew. Did they know,



also, that he was the son-in-law of the old Marchese? Not likely. Still, they kept one another's secrets. More than once, Cooper had suspected that he was followed on his strolls among the hills: now he was sure of it.

Well, he knew where the Forcella farm lay; let them follow him on the morrow, and welcome! But why had there been only one grave? This mental query frightened him into strange leaps of the imagination. He dreamed of Donna Cecilia that night; she was standing beside the grave and smiling at the flowers he had put there.

With morning he started out. The Forcella farm lay in a higher recess of the hills; he had never been there. He wondered how Nicolo had known about the Marchese. Nella made him up a packet of bread and cheese, and he started away at his usual fast walk. Around the turn of the road he was halted by a voice.

"Signor! Signor Roberto!"

It was thus Nicolo called him. He looked around and saw no one.

"Where are you?" he demanded. "Going to walk a mile with me?"

"No, no! I am hiding here among the rocks, signor. Last night Ruffo beat me for talking too much, after Papa went away. If you see the little Francesco up there, tell him I am coming to see him; they are sending me tomorrow. He is my friend."

"Right. I'll tell him. You've been there before, have you?"

"Oh, yes! More than once, signor. *Addio!*"

"Until later!" rejoined Cooper. Under his breath he added: "And I'd just like to catch that old devil Ruffo beating you!"

THOUGHTFULLY he went his way. They were sending Nicolo away; why? And why to the Forcella farm, where he had been before? That was how he had known about the old Marchese, of course. The boy was being sent tomorrow and not today—if at all, why not now? He talked too much: queer reason for sending him, unless they were afraid of what he might tell the American—

Good Lord! Cooper came to a dead halt. They knew, they all knew, his object here! And they were leagued to keep the truth secret, just as Marcantonio would have lied about knowing the Marchese! He went on again, his wits suddenly sharpened by comprehension. The little Francesco, a friend of Nicolo evidently living at the Forcella farm—could it be that this was the Principe di San Severo, the missing heir?

It fitted in: his sense of being followed wherever he went, of being spied upon, the scrap of conversation overheard at Caserta—and back to the hotel manager and the rental car dealer at Naples. The hotel manager had told all he knew of Cooper, which linked him with Quest, Incorporated.

"They're on to me," he thought. "Sure as fate, they're on to me! But what's more important, I'm on the right track, that's evident! They were afraid Nicolo would tell me about this boy Francesco, of course! It begins to come clear now."

Clear indeed, and excitement grew upon him. So Marcantonio had gone out last night, eh! He remembered the glance exchanged with Ruffo. Ten to one, Marcantonio had taken warning to the Marchese; that would soon be determined. If so, everything would fall into line. By this time, Cooper had almost forgotten his prime reason for seeking out the old man.

It was a long climb to the Forcella farm, not by reason of distance, but because the place lay in a retired niche of the Apennine foothills and the road was a rough, narrow track barely practicable for a cart to follow. It was a deserted track, too; anything might happen here. Nothing did, however; it was still an hour before noon when Cooper came up the last rise and sighted the little shell in which the farm lay.

Fronting the south, it was a vineyard, with a little cluster of old buildings well back, beneath a group of trees. Two vine-dressers, a man and a woman, were at work among the vines by the road. The man came over to meet Cooper. He was a bold-looking fellow.

"Good morning, signor," he said civilly. "I am Gian' Forcella, if you seek me."

"Not you, signor, but the Marchese," said Cooper.

The other showed no surprise but waved his hand toward the buildings. "You will find him in his chair in the sun, behind the house," he said. "I regret that I cannot ask you to have a glass of wine; but that is for him to do. He is jealous of his rights; this is the last of his castles and estates, you comprehend."

"The will is more gracious than the deed," said Cooper, and went on, smiling. So they had expected him! He knew where Marcantonio had gone, the previous evening.

Behind the pleasant little farmhouse, he saw the old man sitting in a wheel-chair. For an instant his heart shrank; then he advanced and doffed his hat. The eyes were bitter as of old: they were bent upon him from beneath shaggy gray brows; he was recognized.

"So you have come back, American!" rasped the harsh old voice. "And I am powerless to whip you from the place or to have it done, as I should like."

Cooper was flushed and hot from his climb, but his face paled under that hard gaze.

"Have not the years brought a little kindliness into your heart?" he asked quietly. "We both loved her, Marchese; her memory should bring blessings and forgiveness. And there is so much I could do for you—"

"I shall hate you while there is life in me," said the Marchese. "The very sight of you, the sound of you, spells hatred. I hate you too much to want to kill you. I could have done it very easily with a pistol hidden in my lap, for I knew you were coming. But I want you to live and suffer, a long time, a long time!"

"I'm sorry for you," Cooper replied gently. "Every man who truly loves, Marchese, has an altar deep in his heart where he worships reverently—or perhaps, as I do, lays spiritual flowers daily, flowers of memory and devotion. Perhaps you once had such an altar in your heart, which now lies desolate and ruined; I am sorry for you. Love consoles, but hate is a living cancer."

A smile grew in the gray and bitter face.



With a rush and bellow of oaths, Forcella and another man lunged at Cooper.

"Well, ask it!" said the Marchese. "Ask the question!"

"What question?" demanded Cooper, surprised.

"The one you came here to ask! The one I have waited for you to ask!" The old man uttered a cackle of harsh laughter. "Suffer! You have not yet begun to suffer as I shall make you suffer, as I have planned you shall suffer! So ask the question."

"Oh! It is true, there was a question," said Cooper. "I visited the grave of Cecilia yesterday. But where was the baby buried?"

"Oh! The baby!" The Marchese mocked him. "The little Roberto, as you named him! Why, he is in Naples, or perhaps in Palermo now."

Cooper frowned. "What do you mean? You sent me a photograph of the tombstone."

"Certainly. And I wrote you he was dead. And now I tell you that he did not die but lived. Your son, do you understand? I took him, as you took my daughter. And you shall never see him or find him or learn his fate, for he will be brought up as a peasant in the hills of Sicily. Now grieve! Suffer! Shed tears!"

Cooper became white again, and whiter; this evil, crafty old man spoke the truth. The boy had not died of the plague with the mother. The boy—his son, her son! He tried to speak, while the old man breathed hard and cackled his mirth, and failed. A cold fury welled up in him; he made a motion as though to strike, and the Marchese cackled anew.

"Oh, hit me if you like! Kill me if you like! It does not matter, now that I have planted real suffering in your soul, American. Yes, honest peasants have adopted him: not even they know his real name."

COOPER stood motionless, the very heart shriveling within him at the relentless truth and hatred of those words. He perceived how useless any pleading would be, and he held his peace. His son alive, and lost! He had not thought that anything in his life could surpass that former hurt; yet this did so, most cruelly. The torture maddened him, yet his iron will rose to meet it. He would not give this old devil the satisfaction of showing his agony.

"He shall live among the swine. Perhaps he will be a goatherd," went on the Marchese. "A goatherd with blue eyes and reddish hair like yours, and about his neck the little gold cross that belonged to his mother—not to you, American. Go to the city, go to Sicily, find him if you can! But he will never be found. He has another name, another family—"

Cooper turned and walked away stonily, so great a hurt in him that he could not think or speak. The evil cackle of mirth pursued him like a stabbing knife across the sunlight. Blue eyes—the little gold cross he so well remembered—

He came around to the front of the farmhouse and paused, beyond sight of that old man. His fists were clenched; grief was beginning to strike into him, with thought of what the boy would have meant to him and of all he would have meant to the boy. He choked it down. He saw the two vine-dressers coming up the path

toward him, gazing at him. With an effort, he got control of himself and went on to meet them.

"Ah, signor, the Marchese did not ask you to eat with us?" asked the man. Cooper forced a smile and shook his head, and remembered his other errand here.

"No, he did not."

"Well, he is the *patron* and must have his way!" said the man.

"Where is Francesco?" Cooper asked sharply. They both stared at him blankly, until the woman spoke.

"Oh, the boy Francesco! The signor means him."

"So!" Gian' Forcella laughed. "With his people, I suppose."

"I have a message for him, from Nicolo, the son of Marcantonio, who is coming here."

The man spread his hands. "Signor, who knows? The boy comes now and then to play, when Nicolo is here. I cannot say; it is not my affair at all."

They were lying, of course; Cooper dared not press them, lest they suspect his determination to reach that boy Francesco. His own suspicions were given strength.

"Oh, it's of no importance," he said carelessly, and bidding them farewell, went on down the path.

He went back toward Caserta. The mountain air made him hungry; he sat down beside a bubbling stream, ate and drank, moved on mechanically. That talk with the old man had left death in his soul. Naples! He must get to Naples now, let everything else drop, and start to work. There would be ways—

But there had been no way to trace the missing heir of San Severo.

ON a deserted hillside he flung himself down under an oak tree and tried desperately to think, to make decisions, to plan. It was impossible. His impulse now was to rush back and face the Marchese, talk further with him, pry some clue out of him. Exactly what the old devil would like him to do! No, no! Do nothing rash. Make haste slowly. Sleep on it and act cautiously.

With a groan, he pulled himself up and continued his way back.

It was mid-afternoon when Cooper got home. Buxom Nella poured him a glass of the ready wine and he downed it at a gulp, then went to his room. He was exhausted, mentally and physically. Throwing himself down on his bed, he tried to sleep, but could not. He was being tortured by a thousand memories and possibilities; for the moment, he had broken down; he was for the first time feeling the full weight of that old man's vengeance. All about him were enemies, for one reason or another; he was surrounded by subtle, crafty foes. Yet he knew how these very people, so hard and ruthless, crumpled under a more ruthless hand of iron.

When he was called for supper, he gave no answer; he wanted to see no one. He heard Nella tiptoe to his door, and closed his eyes; she went away again. Darkness crowded upon the hills. His window was open. After a time he heard Marcantonio, in the courtyard, speak to the carter Ruffo.

"An hour before dawn will be time enough. I'll wake the boy."

So Ruffo was taking Nicolo up there, probably with the two mules! Cooper's numbed brain began to come awake, and it awoke with a sudden clear-cut acuity of vision. The main thing was the little Prince, of course! A nest of hill scorpions, all these people! Well, at least he could get away with the boy he had come to find; he could complete his job for Quest and then plunge into his own personal problem!

Like a flash of light, he saw how to do the whole thing. They would suspect nothing. He sat up, pulled on his boots, and from his bag took his old Colt—not a pistol, but a long revolver of ancient vintage, true to the eye as a rifle. He wrapped this up and stumped down the stairs. Nella was clearing away the dishes, and Marcantonio casting up his accounts.

"No, nothing to eat, thanks," he said to their offers. "I'm going down to Caserta for the evening—I may spend the night there at the hotel I've a very bad headache."

He walked out and strode rapidly down the road.

It was still early when he came to Caserta, but he just did make the garage as the owner was closing for the night. He knew better than to talk to any of these people, now; he said, instead, that he was going back to Naples for a day or two, and paid the man. Then he wheezed the Fiat out, went over to the Vittoria hotel by the station and got both an excellent supper and a recent road-map of the district. He studied the map attentively.

As he had thought, there was another road by which one might reach San Lencio and the neighborhood of the Forcella farm, although it swung around by way of Vallo and Santa Agata; there would be only a mile or so to walk at the end. It was no auto road, though.

The Fiat melted into the night, and for a space the road, following the railway, was good enough; then it grew bad, and finally worse. He was a good hour making the last ten miles; and after leaving San Lencio, the track was impossible. However, he had reached the desired spot. He halted the car, made himself comfortable, set the alarm-clock in his mind for three o'clock, and went to sleep.

He wakened before three, stiff and cold, to starlight and a wan pale moon.

The sun was up and the air was warming, when two mules climbed the steep roadway under the Forcella farm. Ruffo was mounted on one, Nicolo on the other; the boy was sleepy and angry, the carter in vile humor. At the copse of mountain oak under the farm, Nicolo drew rein.

"I tell you, I will not!" he shrilled. "They are not good people up there; that old man casts the evil eye! There is no kindness in them. They are worse than you or Marcantonio; and my friend Francesco was all black and blue with a beating, last time I was here. I'll run away with him, I tell you!"

"*Corpo di Bacco!* You imp of Satan, you'll do as you're told!" growled Ruffo. "One more word out of you, and I'll give you a hiding to remember! Ah, you would—"

THE boy was sliding out of the saddle Ruffo swung down and caught him by the nape of the neck and dragged him to the nearest of the trees. He caught up a stick and despite cries and struggles, began to give Nicolo a sound beating.

"Ha!" cried a voice. "Here's a better victim, you rascal!"

A cry of delight broke from Nicolo, an oath from Ruffo, as Cooper emerged from the copse and came at them. Ruffo's hand slid toward his broad knife, but little good it did him; without a word more, Cooper proceeded to thrash him thoroughly, until he was yelling for help. With a final kick, he sent the bleeding, cursing old rogue flying down the track, the mules forgotten, and turned laughing to the boy.

"So! That will settle him."

"But Signor Roberto! It is a terrible thing!" broke out the boy, wide-eyed. "He is a famous killer! He and Marcantonio have killed two men; I heard them talking about it when they were drinking and thought I was asleep! They will kill you!"

"Not much," said Cooper, slapping him on the shoulder. "So you don't want to visit the people here, eh?"

"No I want to go to Naples with you."

"Naples? But I can't take you away from your father and mother."

"They? *Per Bacco!* They're none of mine!" broke out the boy hotly. "I've sworn to run away, and I'll do it! So will Francesco—"

"Hold on. Not your father and mother?"

"No. They are some sort of relatives, and brought me from Naples with them; they've told me so. Nella is kind, yes; not the others. I think she is my aunt."

Cooper reflected. "Well, I'll take a chance; at least, I can take you to Naples and get in touch with the authorities there. First, I want to see your friend Francesco. They told me he was not here, yesterday; they said he lived somewhere else."

"A lie," snapped Nicolo. "He lives in the farmhouse with them. The old Marchese lives in the little house behind."

"Very well; you help me, and I'll help you," said Cooper. "Go on up to the farm as though you had come by yourself from home. They know you're coming. Then, as soon as possible, bring Francesco down here to see me. Can you do it?"

"Oh, yes, easily. But Signor Roberto, you'll not go and leave me?"

"Upon my honor, Nicolo. You shall go to Naples with me. Perhaps Francesco too. Do you know whether he has a brown mole on his back, between his shoulders?"

Nicolo shook his head. "I don't know, but I can see. When shall I go?"

"Now."

A momentary hesitation, then Nicolo turned to the path and went.

Cooper picked up the knife Ruffo had dropped, and examined it, then tethered the two mules and settled down to wait. A killer, eh? He and Marcantonio had killed two men—and two investigators, on the traces of the little lost prince, had been killed!

"Looks as if I'd struck it, sure enough," he reflected. "If Francesco is the lad I'm after, I can take him along and be damned to them. If he's not—I'd be in the soup. I won't go back on Nicolo. The fact that I rescued him from a bad beating, and that Marcantonio is not his father, ought to clear me with the authorities; cruelty to children just isn't the thing, in Italy. Hm! But if Francesco is not the Prince, it'd be plain kidnaping; so make certain before you act, or you'll land in jail!"

TIME passed; the sun rose higher. Cooper ate a bar of chocolate he had brought along, found a trickle of water down the road, and came back to sit and smoke and watch the mules. The big Colt irked him, and he laid it aside. He chuckled over the amazement and dismay and fury of Ruffo at seeing him and feeling his heavy hand; it was a satisfaction to have given that rascal what he deserved.

Here in the narrow defile, lost to the world, the heat increased. Cooper was not worried; he knew it might be a long time before Nicolo got his chance to steal away with Francesco. He and the mules were quite hidden from sight of those at the farm below. It would not do to linger here too long. Ruffo and Marcantonio would probably come hotfoot, sooner or later. However, he was so confident that Francesco would prove to be his quarry that he was not particularly concerned about the wine-merchant.

"Hm! Might have questioned Nicolo about his friend," he reflected. "Francesco, if he's the Prince, would be about the same age as Nicolo. These dark-haired, black-eyed kids all look alike; it's the mole that will prove the truth."

Another cigarette was finished. He looked at his watch, and started in surprise and chagrin. The morning was half gone. Uneasy, he rose and tucked the Colt under his belt; then, to his vast relief, came a panting scramble, and there was Nicolo in the path, bright-eyed with excitement and laughing.

"He's coming, Signor Roberto! But I pulled up his shirt and looked at his back, and there are no moles on it at all."

This was startling news. "Are you sure?"

"*Ecco!* There he is. Look for yourself, signor."

Another scramble, and Cooper's heart fell. Utter and complete dismay seized him; this Francesco, instead of being a boy of Nicolo's age, was a little fellow—not more than four at a guess. He stood sucking a thumb and staring with wide eyes at Cooper. Wide eyes . . . wide eyes—why, good God! Blue eyes! Blue eyes and reddish hair, and a dangling golden cross on a chain about his neck—

Cooper swayed as under a blow; and it was a blow. For an instant his heart stopped. The truth flashed across his brain; it rushed upon him and blotted out the sunlight. Then his eyes cleared, and a groan escaped him. Fool, blind fool that he had been! This was not the boy he had sought, but his own son—the crafty old Marchese had lied brazenly!

"Well, Sor Roberto?" Nicolo spoke up impatiently. "If you are going to take us away, we had better go, because I think Gian' Forcella is coming after us."

Cooper came to life. He went to the child and stooped, and examined the gold cross. Yes, the same, her name graven upon the gold. A sudden wild laugh broke from him, as he folded the child in his arms—his son, his son!

"Not Francesco, but Roberto!" said he, and swept the delighted boy up in his arms, perching him on a shoulder. "Come along, Signor Nicolo—my brave Sor Nicolo! Your friend is my own son, who was lost and is found again. Come along to the mules!"



Cooper flung himself down and blessed his stubborn love for the old revolver.

They started for the tethered mules; but the eager Nicolo broke into a sharp cry of dismayed alarm. Furious voices echoed; there, a hundred yards down the slope, were Marcantonio and Ruffo, both of them bawling angrily and profanely. And from above came answering cries. Gian' Forcella was not alone, up there.

"Scramble aboard, Nicolo!" ordered Cooper calmly. He had sized up the situation at a glance; whatever happened, the two boys must go. Nicolo was already clambering into the saddle of one mule. Cooper handed Francesco over to him, then loosed the animal's tether.

"Up the valley toward San Lencio!" he said. "You'll see my car waiting there where the road gets rocky. Keep Francesco safe; I'll meet you there, at the car. Understood? Go!"

The animal jumped as he slapped its rump, and clattered off nimbly. Marcantonio, toiling upward with the carter, was shouting volubly, but not at Cooper. He understood when, with a rush and a bellow of oaths, Forcella and another man were down the path and lunging at him in blind ferocity, broad knives out.

He had no time, no chance, to free his Colt; the vine-dresser was almost upon him. Cooper dodged the rush and planted a blow under the jaw that knocked Forcella aside and sent him sprawling; he felt the knife rip at his arm, and blood spurted. The Colt came free. The second man saw it and leaped aside with a yell of warning; he stood there in abrupt fright. But Gian' Forcella, oblivious or not caring, was up and coming with knife ready.

He walked straight into it—a savage slap over the head with the long barrel that dropped him in a senseless heap. The second man yelped, as Cooper turned toward him, and darted into the brush out of sight. The heavy crash of a rifle filled the rocky defile with echoes; Cooper actually felt the heat of the bullet on his cheek. That was Marcantonio. Ruffo was legging it for the rocks on the opposite slope. Again Marcantonio fired—but Cooper was already ducking into the brush. He flung himself down, lay flat, and worked getting his handkerchief bound around his slashed arm—a one-handed job. Then, cautiously, he peered forth.

Marcantonio stood where he was. But Ruffo was on the opposite slope, heading up-valley and apparently following some track. Cooper guessed his objective—to circle and get after the two boys—and now blessed his own stubborn love for the cumbersome old well-tried revolver. In this pinch any pocket pistol would have been utterly useless, but with the Colt it would be different.

Next month, "The affair of the Unfinished Search" takes us to post-war Norway.

The long barrel jumped, and jumped again, and the reports echoed. Ruffo doubled up and went rolling; he was, at least, hit and out of the game. Cooper heard a scramble behind him, and recollected Forcella's companion. He twisted about; as he did so, a jagged bit of rock smashed him between the shoulders and knocked him flat again. Another followed, striking the back of his skull and sending showers of sparks through his brain. He relaxed limply.

With an exultant yell, the second vine-dresser burst from cover, and Marcantonio hurried to meet him. They conferred. Ruffo uprose among the rocks, and Marcantonio laid down his rifle.

"Ruffo! Come and take the gun. Watch the American. We must get those accursed boys!"

Ruffo assented with a gesture and came hobbling. Without the delay of an instant, Marcantonio and the vine-dresser took the second mule and started up the valley.

COOPER wakened to a sound of cursing. Here was Gian' Forcella fingering his split scalp and helping Ruffo bandage a hip-wound. Between them lay Cooper's big revolver, and Ruffo was leaning on a rifle. Cooper blinked. The other men were gone; he could guess where and why.

Worse than the flaming pain of back and head, was this thought: Instinctively, he knew delay was fatal. He gathered his muscles; unless he acted now, while the two men thought him senseless, everything was lost. He himself, and more than himself—

Prodded more by pain than by anger, he was up and flinging himself at the two, without pausing to think. They whipped around to meet this avenging fury, too late; a hard fist bowled Ruffo over and the rifle clattered on the stones. A booted toe under the jaw stretched Gian' Forcella flat again before the broad knife could strike. It was ended in a flash. Cooper picked up the rifle, swung it by the barrel, and smashed off the stock against the stones. With the Colt in hand, he started up the valley.

A grim and bitter journey, though there was only a couple of miles to go. The slashed arm throbbed, and still dripped blood; and blood clotted his hair, and his hurt back shrieked agony. Teeth set, he labored on regardless, driven by an iron will. Though he were dying on his feet, he would have kept on.

The track was steep. Once he stumbled and fell. Twice he rested, gasping; that rock in the back must have broken a rib, for the pain was a keen stab there. The Colt shoved under his belt, he struggled forward, spent and failing; the heat sent his brain whirling in giddy circles. But he was nearing the spot where he had left the locked car.

He saw them coming, and he could not move; he stood leaning back against a boulder, faint and dizzy. There were the mules. The vine-dresser rode one, holding Francesco; Marcantonio bestrode the other with Nicolo in front of him. The boy was naked to the waist, his shirt torn away, his wrists pinioned by a rag.

They saw him, they halted the mules, they dismounted and came with long knives out; they were not aware of the Colt under his jacket. Cooper eyed them and could not gather strength. The child Francesco, who had been set down, came running to him past the two men, shrieking something at him. That voice, those clinging hands, burst the bonds of weakness. Cooper lifted his head; he was helpless to stand any close-quarter scrimmage, and knew it. He spoke out.

"Marcantonio! I have eaten with you; I do not want to kill you. Go your ways. You have lost, I have won—"

A jeering laugh burst from the wine-merchant. "Indeed? What you have won is ten inches of cold steel, you fool! At him, brother! Kick the child out of the way."

Cooper jerked out the Colt. A yell, and Marcantonio was coming at him; he shot the man between the eyes. A second explosion. The vine-dresser dropped his knife, howled with pain and departed at a run, holding a bleeding arm. Cooper swung the Colt and flung it away, and reached down to touch the clinging hands.

Nicolo came to him. "Sor Roberto! Free my arms!"

Cooper leaned over and tugged at the knotted rag. Then he paused in astonishment.

"Nicolo! Turn around a little more—so I can see your back. There!"

On the boy's back, between the shoulders, he saw a large brown mole. . . .

And that, my friends, is all the story of File 13N-621. You may recall reading in the press about the finding of the lost Principe di San Severo; of the American who was involved and was cleared in the courts for killing one of the kidnapers; but when it comes to considering thirteen as a hoodoo, neither Quest, Incorporated, nor its new vice-president, Robert Cooper, takes any stock in superstition.

THERE'S SOMETHING

IT'S NEVER IN THE PAPERS

EVERY morning when I came downstairs I sat in the mess and looked for it in the papers. "Last night our bombers . . ." I would read. "Yesterday evening at dusk a strong formation . . ." But what I really looked for was never there.

I used to consider the case of Dibden. Dibden was twenty-five. He was a pilot with thirty-three operational trips and a D.F.C. to his name. He flew Stirlings and looked more than anything else like a dark, very handsome little Eskimo. You felt that it was a pure accident that he was flying a bomber instead of doing a roll in a kayak or having a snooze in an igloo.

Dibden was a good type, and a very good pilot indeed. But there were some who would not fly with him. Navigators, changed from their own crew, would suddenly develop violent toothache or trouble with their ears. Dibden was rather proud of the way he could land a Stirling in fair imitation of a golf-ball.

Once, on circuit and bumps, Dibden began to come in for landing with his air-speed down to ninety. He pulled her off again and did a sickly turn over the telegraph posts on the railway line and came back to land on the established golf-ball principle, hastily. "It was quite a moment," Dibden said.

There was nothing about that in the papers. Nor, of course, was there anything about the way he had all his operational hours carefully added up. His thirty-three trips amounted to a hundred and fifty hours.

Very soon, with another fifty hours, Dibden would be a veteran—an old man of twenty-five who had watched others do their three and five and perhaps fifteen trips and not return. Dibden always returned; like a ball thrown at a wall he came back, and the harder you threw him, the faster he returned.

Once or twice a week, when not on ops., Dibden got a little whistled, but the papers, of course, did not mention this either. You came into the mess late at night, tired, perhaps, after a spell of duty, to find Dibden bouncing from chair to chair, table to piano, like a smiling cherubic little Eskimo chasing an invisible bear.

At intervals he stopped being the Eskimo and became the bear, rushing up to other people, especially newcomers, to embrace them. "Bad type, bad type!" he would say. "Seize him, knock him down. Bad type!" We were all bad types when Dibden was whistled, but the papers, of course, did not mention this either. We are very good types really.

After these adventures others came down to breakfast with faces looking the colour of the sheepskin on their flying-boots; they looked at the mess of kidneys and bacon and said: "My God, I've had it," and crawled away.

But not Dibden. He bounced in very late, more cherubic than ever, charmed the first overworked waitress into bringing him crisp rashers, potatoes, kidneys, fresh toast, and coffee, looked at the clock and said something about five minutes to make the hangars, and then began to eat as if he had returned from a hunting expedition. "Pretty whistled last night, boys," he would say. "Rather off my feed."

He spent most of the rest of his life being brassed off. "Good morning, Dibden," you would say. "How goes it?"

"Pretty much brassed off, old boy."

"Oh, what's wrong?"

"Just brassed off, that's all. Just brassed off."

This phrase, which, of course, was never in the papers either, covered all the troubles of Dibden's life. It covered all his troubles with his kite, his crew, his ops., his leave, his food, his popsy.

He was brassed off when ops. were on because of the increasing monotony of trying to prang the same target; he was brassed off when ops. were scrubbed because there was no target at all. He was brassed off because there was fog on the drome or because his popsy could not keep her date.

But however brassed off he was, he succeeded in looking always the same: cherubic, grinning, bouncing, handsome, too irresponsible, and altogether too like a schoolboy to be engaged in the serious business of flying an expensive bomber.

One afternoon Dibden was out over the coast of Holland on a daylight. It was his thirty-third trip: the veteran adding another four or five hours to his flying time. Down below, off the coast, he saw what he took to be an enemy tanker and he went down to have a look-see.

The tanker opened up at him with a fury of flak that surprised him, holing his port wing. I do not know what his emotions were, but I imagine that he was, simply, and as always, just brassed off. He went in and attacked the tanker with all he had, bombing first and then diving to machine-gun the deck.

The tanker hit back very hard, clipping a piece out of the starboard flap, but the more the tanker hit, the more Dibden bounced back, like the ball thrown hard against the wall. His rear gunner was very badly wounded, but Dibden still went in, firing with all he had left until the flak from the tanker ceased.

THE next day there was in fact something about this in the papers. It did not sound very epic. "Yesterday afternoon one of our bombers attacked a tanker off the Dutch coast. After the engagement the tanker was seen to be burning."

It did not say anything about the holes in Dibden's wings or the way the outer port engine had cracked coming home. It did not, in fact, really say anything at all about that brief, bloody, and very bitter affair in which Dibden had bounced back repeatedly like an angry ball, or about the long journey home.

It did not say anything about Dibden landing on three engines with damaged flaps and a dying rear gunner, or about a very tired, very brassed-off Dibden coming in very late, with an unexpected hour on his flying time, to boiled beef and tea.

Nor did it say anything about what happened that night. A little after midnight I came into the mess and there, under the bright lights of the anteroom, Dibden was doing some acrobatics. It was a very nice little party. At one end of the room two leather settees were placed endwise against each other, and then against them, endwise again, two chairs.

in the AIR

by Flying Officer X
(H. E. Bates)

As I came in, Dibden, more cherubic, more smiling, more like a handsome Eskimo than ever, took a drink of light ale and then did a running somersault over the long line of furniture, landing with a wild whoop on his feet. His eyes were shining wildly. After him one or two other pilots tried it, but none of them was really good, and the only one who was good landed on his head. Then Dibden tried it again, and the fat, smiling ball of his body went over as easily as a bird.

Perhaps there was no connection between the schoolboy Dibden joyfully throwing a somersault and the veteran Dibden angrily pranging a tanker. But as I saw Dibden hurling his fat little body into the air I felt suddenly that I understood all about his thirty-three trips, his golf-ball landings, his affairs with the tanker, and the long, hard journey home. I understood why he flew, and why he flew as he did, and I understood the man he was.

But there was nothing about that, of course, in the papers.

K *for* KITTY

HARRISON was one of those lean, brown, old-eyed Australians who seem to accept England with a tolerance that Canadians never know. If there were things about England that needed changing or setting right Harrison rarely talked about them. If there were better pilots I rarely met them. Harrison was quiet, modest, friendly, and as tough as hell.

It was not Harrison, but someone else, who first talked to me of the idea that planes and ships have the same delicate and temperamental ways. Just as you find no two ships alike, so you find no two planes alike; just as you find ships that are heavy, graceless, unalive, so you find planes that are dull and wooden in the air. In the same way that seamen come to know, trust, and finally get fond of a ship, knowing that she is a living thing and will never fail them, so pilots come to know and trust and get fond of a plane, knowing she will bring them home. In every squadron there is, I suppose, a plane that everybody hates. Then one day somebody quietly wraps it up in a distant corner of the drome and everybody is relieved and glad. But in every squadron there is a plane that everyone likes, that is something more than a pattern of steel and wood and instruments and mechanism, that is a living, graceful, fortunate, and ultimately triumphant thing, and this was the sort of plane that Harrison had.

Harrison's plane was a big four-engined Stirling called K for Kitty. The kite, like Harrison, was no stranger to the shaky do. On a trip to Brest the bomb doors froze up and would not release. This was bad enough. But the starboard outer also failed on the journey home, so that Harrison was obliged to land on three engines, with a full bomb load, in darkness—the sort of heroism for which, at the moment, we have struck no special gong. On other trips other things happened. Something happened to the flaps; the undercarriage jammed; the radio went u.s.—it does not matter. For the heroism of overcoming such minor misfortunes there are no gongs either.

After such trips Harrison naturally trusted and grew fond of K for Kitty. Not that I think he ever said so. He would call the kite a good kite or perhaps, if he were a little happy, a wizard kite. These events in K for Kitty bore, after all, only a very slight relation to suicide. It was not until the big Brest trip that anything really serious happened to the plane.

I am not sure if this raid, made on a clear blue winter afternoon when the sunlight was light orange-coloured and the horizon peaceful with light haze, was the biggest ever made on Brest. But that night many bottles were opened and many songs sung, and I conclude from that, at least, that it was very big. And among the many planes that went Harrison was in K for Kitty.

Nor am I sure if they tried to blow Harrison to small pieces before he bombed or after. Possibly both. Finally a force of Messerschmitts attacked him, in a rapid succession of ten, and put out of action every turret he had. Tracer tore at all angles through the nose and body of the plane. It shaved the skin off the knuckles of Harrison and his second dicky. It smashed the intercomm. and mortally wounded the engineer. Blood flowed over the floor of the plane, mingling stickily with oil. It was hard to stand up and the gunners could not fire and there were no warning voices in the intercomm.

Many other things had happened that Harrison did not then know about, but was to know about later. He was glad enough to see Spitfires coming up as escort, and the Messerschmitts diving home to tea. He was glad to be out of it and setting course for home again. He was quite glad that K for Kitty was his plane.

At home, in the bright calm golden air of the late winter afternoon, Harrison brought her down gently and beautifully, making a perfect landing. He even succeeded in holding for some distance to the runway. And then everything that had not already happened began to happen at once. It was as if the kite had blown home held together only by strips of sticky plaster and string; as if she were a toy plane, put together by children, that could not withstand the vibration of contact with earth.

She began to fall to pieces suddenly, terrifyingly; and almost systematically. The starboard outer air-screw fell off, and then the starboard inner engine fell out completely. Then the complete starboard wing fell off, and then both the fallen wing and the fallen engine caught fire. Just before she came to rest, the port wing was flung high into the air like the arm of someone drowning, and remained there, high and stiff and awkward and dead.

I DO not know how Harrison and the crew got out of the plane, slipping and skidding in the oily blood and lifting the wounded engineer, then skidding and falling down in the blood again, the plane burning all the time, the main door jammed and only the forward hatch available for lifting to safety the heavy wounded man. It seemed at any moment that the plane might blow up. But somehow Harrison and the crew and the wounded man got out and the plane did not blow up.

She was still there, in that lop-sided, high-flung position, flat-tired, partially burnt, when I went across the field next morning. Harrison was there

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too, looking at her. He was pacing up and down. The burnt, ash-coloured wreckage of the plane lay scattered in an almost straight line across the grass. Beyond the last grey scraps of wreckage the tire marks of the plane made brown parallel lines in the muddy grass as far as the runway. Harrison walked up the tracks made by the flattened tires, stooped down to look at them, and then walked back, stooping down again. Finally he came back to the plane.

We stood there for a long time together, looking at the plane. We picked up scraps of wreckage and dropped them again in the grass. We looked at the flattened tires and the broken undercarriage and the splintered turret. We examined the ugly rising lines of tracer holes, neat and straight as the crotches of a rising scale punched everywhere across the flat face of the fuselage. We stood under the high, up-flung wing, smashed by flak, that looked more than ever like a stiff dead arm. We looked at everything in amazement and unbelief and then looked again.

Long after I left, Harrison was still standing by the plane. And once, as I walked across the field, I turned and looked back.

He was still standing there in the same attitude, looking at K for Kitty. I could not see his face, but it seemed as if he were looking at something rather distantly. It seemed even possible that he was looking at something he could not see.

It was like the attitude of a seaman who looks across empty water, for the last time, and sees his ship no longer there.

The YOUNG MAN *from* KALGOORLIE

HE lived with his parents on a sheep-farm two hundred miles north-east of Kalgoorlie. The house was in the old style, a simple white wooden cabin to which a few extensions had been added by successive generations. On the low hills east of the farm there were a few eucalyptus trees; his mother grew pink and mauve asters under the house windows in summer; and in spring the wattle was in blossom everywhere, like lemon foam. All of his life had been lived there, and the war itself was a year old before he knew that it had even begun.

On the bomber station, surrounded by flat grey English hills cropped mostly by sugar-beet and potatoes and steeped in winter-time in thick windless fogs that kept the aircraft grounded for days at a time, he used to tell me how it had come to happen that he did not know the war had started. It seemed that he used to go down to Kalgoorlie only once, perhaps twice, a year. I do not know what sort of place Kalgoorlie is, but it seemed that he did there, on that one visit or so, all the things that anyone can do on a visit to almost any town in the world. He used to take a room for a week at a hotel, get up at what he thought was a late hour every morning—about eight o'clock—and spend most of the day looking at shops, eating, and then looking at shops again. In the evenings he used to take in a cinema, eat another meal, have a couple of glasses of beer in the hotel lounge, and then go to bed. He confessed that it wasn't very exciting and often he was relieved to get back into the Ford and drive steadily back to the sheep-farm and the familiar horizon of eucalyptus trees, which after the streets of Kalgoorlie did not seem a bad prospect at all. The truth was that he did not know anyone in Kalgoorlie except an aunt, his mother's sister, who was very deaf and used a patent electrical acoustic device which always seemed to go wrong whenever he was there and which he had once spent more than a day trying to repair. He was very quiet and he did not easily get mixed up with people; he was never drunk and more than half the time he was worried that his father was making a mess of things at home.

It was this that was really the cause of his not knowing about the war. His father was an unimaginative and rather careless man to whom sheep were simply sheep, and grass simply grass, and who had kept sheep on the same two thousand acres, within sight of the same eucalyptus trees, for thirty years and expected to go on keeping them there for the rest of his life. He did not understand that two years of bad luck had anything to do with his having kept sheep in the same way, on the same grass, for so long. It was the son who discovered that. He began to see that the native grasses were played out, and in their place he decided to make sowings of Italian rye grass and subterranean clover; and soon he was able to change the flocks from one kind of grass to another and then on to a third, and soon he could see an improvement in the health of every breed they had.

After that he was virtually in charge of the farm. His parents, who had always thought him a wonderful person, now thought him more wonderful still. When neighbors came—and this, too, was not often, since the nearest farm was another thirty miles up country—they talked of nothing but Albert's achievement. The sheep had improved in health, the yield of wool had increased, and even the mutton, they argued, tasted sweeter now, more like the meat of thirty years ago. "Got a proper old-fashioned flavor," his mother said.

It was about a year after these experiments of his—none of them very original, since he had simply read up the whole subject in an agricultural paper—that war broke out. It seemed, as he afterwards found out, that his mother first heard of it on an early-morning news bulletin on the radio. She was scared and she called his father. The son himself was out on the farm, riding round on horseback taking a look at the sheep before breakfast. When he came in to breakfast he switched on the radio, but nothing happened. He opened up the radio and took a look at it. All the valves were warm, but the detector valve and another were not operating. It seemed a little odd, but he did not take much notice of it. All he could do was to write to Kalgoorlie for the spare valves, and he did so in a letter which he wrote after dinner that day. It was three miles to the post-box and if there were any letters to be posted his mother took them down in the afternoon. His mother took this letter that afternoon and tore it up in little pieces.

That must have happened, he discovered, to every letter he wrote to the Kalgoorlie radio shop in the next twelve months. No valves ever came and gradually, since it was summer and sheep-shearing time and the busiest season of the year, the family got used to being without the radio. His father and mother said they even preferred it. All the time he had no idea of the things they were doing in order to keep the war from him. The incoming post arrived once a week, and if there were any letters for him, his mother steamed them open, read them, and then put the dangerous ones away in a drawer upstairs. The newspapers stopped coming, and when he remarked on it his father said he was tired of wasting good money on papers that were anyway nearly a week old before they came. If there were visitors his mother managed to meet them before they reached the house. In October the sheep-shearing contractors came and his father, ordinarily a rather careful man, gave every man an extra pound to keep his mouth shut. All through that summer and the following winter his mother looked very ill, but it was not until later that he knew the reason of it—the strain of intercepting the letters, of constantly guarded conversation, of warning neighbors and callers, of making excuses, and even of lying to him, day after day, for almost a year.

The time came when he decided to go to Kalgoorlie. He always went there about the same time of the year, in late August, before the busy season started. His parents must have anticipated and dreaded that moment, and his father did an amazing thing. In the third week of August, early one morning, he put two tablespoons of salt in a cup of hot tea and drank it, making himself very sick. By the time Albert came in to breakfast, his father was back in bed, very yellow in the face, and his mother was crying because he had been taken suddenly ill. It was the strangest piece of deception of all and it might have succeeded if his father had not overdone things. He decided to remain in bed for a second week, making himself sick every third or fourth day, knowing that once September had come, Albert would never leave. But Albert was worried. He did not like the recurrent sickness which now affected his father and he began to fear some sort of internal trouble.

"I'm going to Kalgoorlie whether you like it or not," he said, "to get a doctor."

II

IT was on the bomber station, when he had become a pilot, that he used to tell me of that first day in Kalgoorlie, one of the most remarkable in his life. When he left the farm his mother seemed very upset, and began crying. He felt that she was worried about his father; he was increasingly worried too and promised to be back within three days. Then he drove down to Kalgoorlie alone, perhaps the only man in Australia who did not know that the war was a year old.

He arrived at Kalgoorlie about four o'clock in the afternoon and the town seemed much the same as ever. He drove straight to the hotel he always stayed at, booked himself a room, and went upstairs to wash and change. About five o'clock he came down again and went into the hotel lounge for a cup of tea. Except for a word or two with the cashier and the lift-boy he did not speak to a soul. He finished his tea and then decided to go to the downstairs saloon, as he always did, to get himself a haircut. There were several people waiting in the saloon, but he decided to wait too. He sat down and picked up a paper.

He must have gone on staring at that paper, not really reading it, for about ten minutes. It was late August and the Nazis were bombing London. He did not understand any of it—who was fighting or what were the causes of it. He simply took in, from the headlines, the story of the great sky battles, the bombing, the murder and destruction, as if they were part of a ghastly fantasy. For the moment he did not feel angry or sick or outraged because he had been deceived. He got up and went out into the street. What he felt, he told me, was very much as if you were suddenly to discover that you had been living in a house where, without knowing it, there was a carrier of smallpox. For months you have lived an ordinary tranquil life, unsuspecting and unafraid, and then suddenly you made the awful discovery that every fragment of your life, from the dust in your shoes to the air you breathed, was contaminated and that you had been living in danger. Because you knew nothing you were not afraid; but the moment you knew anything all the fears and terrors you had not felt in the past were precipitated into one terrible moment of realization.

He also felt a fool. He walked up and down the street. As he passed shops, read placards, saw men in service uniform, fragmentary parts of his life during the past year became joined together, making sense: the broken radio, his unanswered letters, the newspapers, his mother's nervousness, and the fact, above all, that they had not wanted him to come to Kalgoorlie. Slowly he understood all this. He tried to look on it as the simple cunning of country people. He was still too confused to be angry. But what he still did not understand, and what he had to find out about soon, was the war. He did not even know how long it had been going on. He stopped on a street-corner and bought another newspaper. The day before, he read, eighty-seven aircraft had been shot down over England. His hands were trembling as he read it, but it did not tell him the things he wanted to know. And he realized suddenly, as he stood there trembling in the hot sunshine, so amazed that he was still without feeling, that there was no means of knowing these things. He certainly could not know by asking. He imagined for a moment the effect of asking anyone, in the street or the hotel or back in the barber's saloon, a simple question like: "Can you tell me when the war began?" He felt greatly oppressed by a sense of ridicule and bewilderment, by the fear that now, any time he opened his mouth, he was likely to make a ghastly fool of himself.

He walked about for an hour or more, pretending to look at shops, before it occurred to him what to do. Then it came to him quite suddenly that he would go and see the only other person he knew who, like himself, could be cut off from the world of reality: the deaf aunt who lived in Kalgoorlie.

So he spent most of that evening in the old-fashioned parlor of her house, drinking tea, eating custard tarts, lightly brown with veins of nutmeg, and talking as steadily as he could into the electrical acoustic device fixed to the bodice of her dress. From such remarks as "Things look pretty tough in England. Let's see, how long exactly has it been going on now?" he learned most of the elementary things he wanted to know. But there were still things he could not ask, simply because he had no knowledge of them. He could not ask about France or Poland or Holland or Norway. All that he really understood clearly was that England and Germany were at war; that England was being bombed every day by great forces of aircraft; that soon, perhaps, she would be invaded. The simplicity and limitation of his knowledge were in a way, as he said, a good thing. For as he ate the last of the old lady's custard tarts and drank the last cup of tea and said goodnight to her he changed from being the man who knew least about the war in all Australia to the man who had perhaps the clearest, simplest, and most vivid conception of it in the whole continent. Forty years back his father and mother had emigrated from Lincolnshire to Kalgoorlie. Young, newly wed, and with about eighty pounds apart from their passage money, they started a new life. Now the roots of their existence, and so in a way the roots of his own existence, were being threatened with annihilation. This was the clear, simple, terrible thing he understood in such a clear, simple, terrible way.

When he got back to his hotel he drafted a telegram to his parents, telling them, as well as he could, that he understood. Then in the morning he went round to the nearest recruiting center.

I have not so far described what he was like. He was rather tall, fair, and brown in the face; his eyes were a cool blue and his lips thin, determined, and rather tight. He was just twenty-two and he had no way of holding back his anger.

"I want to be a pilot," he said.

"All right," they said. "Good. But you can't be a pilot all of a sudden, just like that."

"No?" he said. "No? We'll bloody soon see."

III

HE adjusted himself as time went on but he carried some of his first angry, terrible conceptions of things across the sea: across the Pacific to Vancouver, across the Atlantic to England. He was never angry with his parents and they in turn ceased being afraid about him. He used to describe to me how he went home on his first leave. From being stupidly

affectionate in one way about him they became stupidly affectionate in quite another. They had not wanted him to go; now, because he had gone, they behaved as if they had everything to do with sending him and nothing to do with keeping him away. They had arranged a party and he said it was the largest gathering of folks anyone had ever seen on the farm. They invited everyone for thirty miles around and one or two people from fifty miles away. They killed several spring lambs and about fifteen fowls and tea was brewing all day long. At night they sang hymns and old songs in the drawing-room round the piano, and they slept in round beds on the floor. In the end he was almost glad to get away.

He promised to write to them often, and he promised also to keep a diary. He always did write and he always kept the diary. He sailed for Vancouver early in the year, and by the spring he was flying Ansons and by the summer he was in England. It was an uncertain and rather treacherous summer, and the harvest was wet and late in the corn country where we were. The potato fields were blighted, so that they looked as if spattered by drops of coffee on the dark rainy autumn days, and for long periods low clouds kept the aircraft down. Gradually the harvest fields were cleaned and the potatoes sacked and carted away, and in place of them you could see pale golden cones of sugar-beet piled in the fields and by the roadsides. I mention the weather because it was almost the only thing about England that troubled him. He longed for the hot dry air of the Australian summer and he used to tell me, as we gazed over the wet flat country, of the days when he had flown over Victoria in a Moth in his shirt sleeves and had looked down on the white beaches shining all along the coast in the sun.

THE weather troubled him, for his anger was still there. He felt that it frustrated him. He could never forget the day in Kalgoorlie when he had first read of the bombing and the mass murder in England and the very headlines of the paper had seemed like an awful dream. He felt that so much of his life had still to be brought up to date. Something had to be vindicated. Yet you could never tell that he was angry. It was easier to tell that he was sometimes afraid; not that he was afraid of dying or being hurt, but of some material thing like mishandling a kite. As he graduated from Moths to Ansons, to Blenheims and Wellingtons, and finally to Stirlings, he felt each time that he would never be big enough for the change to the bigger aircraft, yet it was always because of that fear that he was big enough.

Late that autumn he became captain of a Stirling and about the same time he got to know a girl. Two or three evenings a week, if there were no operations, we used to go down into the town and drink a few glasses of beer at a pub called the Grenadier, and one evening this girl came in. She was very dark and rather sophisticated, with very red lips, and she never wore her coat in the ordinary way but simply had it slung on her shoulders, with the sleeves empty and dangling. "This is Olivia," he said. For some reason I never knew her other name; we most often called her Albert's popsy, but after that, every night we were in the Grenadier, she would come in, and soon, after talking for a time, they would go off somewhere alone together. The weather was very bad at that time and he saw her quite often. And then for a few nights it cleared, and one night, before going over to Bremen, he asked if I would keep his date with her and make his apologies and explain.

HE had arranged to see her at seven o'clock and I made a bad impression by being late. She was irritable because I was late and because, above all, I was the wrong person.

"Don't be angry," I said. "I'm very sorry."

"I'm not angry," she said. "Don't think it. I'm just worried."

"You needn't be worried," I said.

"Why not? Aren't you worried? You're his friend."

"No, I'm not worried," I said. "I'm not worried because I know what sort of pilot he is."

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, what sort of pilot is he?" she said. "He never tells me. He never talks about it at all."

"They never do," I said.

"Sometimes I think I'll never know what sort of person he is at all. Never!"

I felt there was little I could say to her. She was angry because I was the wrong person and because she was frustrated. I bought her several drinks. For a time she was quieter and then once more she got excited.

"One night he'll get shot down and about all I'll know of him is that his name was Albert!"

"Take it easy," I said. "In the first place he won't get shot down."

"No? How are you so sure?"

"Because he's the sort that shoots other people down first."

"Are you trying to be funny?" she said.

"No," I said; and for a few minutes I tried to tell her why it was not funny and why I had spoken that way. I tried quite hard, but I do not think she understood. I realized that she knew nothing of all that had happened in Kalgoorlie—the blank year, the awful discovery about England, the bewilderment and the anger. I tried to make her see that there is a type that thinks of nothing but the idea that he may be shot at; and that there is another type, of which he was one, which thinks of nothing but shooting first. "He's glad to go. He wants to go. It's what he lives for," I said. "Don't you see?"

No sooner had I said it than I realized that it was the stupidest thing in the world to say. It was herself, not flying, that she wanted him to live for. She did not understand, and it would have sounded very silly if I had tried to tell her, that he was engaged on something like a mission of vengeance, that because of all that had happened in Kalgoorlie, and especially that one day in Kalgoorlie, he felt that he had something damnable and cruel and hideous to wipe out from his conception of what was a decent life on earth. Every time he went up, something was vindicated. Nor did she understand, and again it might have sounded foolish too, that it was the living and positive clarity of the whole idea that was really his preservation. All I could say was: "He's the sort that goes on coming back and coming back until they're fed up with him and make him an instructor."

Nevertheless, that night her fears were almost justified. The flak over Bremen was very hostile and it seemed that he had to take a lot of hasty evasive action before he could get clear away along the coast. They had brought him down even then to about two thousand feet. The searchlights were very thick too and it was like daylight in the aircraft marking the time. But as if he couldn't possibly miss the opportunity, he came down to three hundred feet, roaring over the searchlight batteries as his gunners attacked them. They flew for about forty miles in this way, until finally something hit the outer starboard engine and holed the starboard wing. After that they were in a very bad way and got home, as he said, later than originally proposed.

I DO not think he told her about this. It went down into his log and some of it may have gone down into the diary he had promised faithfully to keep for his people back on the farm. He was satisfied that he had blown out about twenty searchlights, and that was all. Something else was vindicated. Two days later he had another go. In quite a short daylight attack along the Dutch coast he got into an argument with a flak ship. He was in a very positive mood and he decided to go down to attack. As

he was coming in, his rear gunner sighted a formation of Messerschmitts coming up astern, and two minutes later they attacked him. He must have engaged them for about fifteen minutes. He had always hated Messerschmitts, and to be attacked by them made him very angry indeed. At the end of the engagement he had shot down two of them and had crippled a third, but they in turn had holed the aircraft in fifteen places. Nevertheless he went down just to carry out his instruction of giving the flak ship a goodbye kiss. She had ceased firing and he went in almost to low level and just missed her with his last two bombs by the stern. As he was coming home his outer port engine gave up, but he tootled in just before darkness, quite happy. "A piece o' cake," he said

I know that he did not tell her about this either, and I could see that she had some excuse for thinking him undemonstrative and perhaps unheroic. For the next two days there was thick fog and rime frost in the early morning that covered the wings of the Stirlings with dusty silver. He was impatient because of the fog and we played many games of cribbage in the mess on the second day, while the crews were grounded.

On the third day he came back from briefing with a very satisfied look on his face. "A little visit to Mr. Salmon and Mr. Gluckstein at Brest," he said. He had been flying just a year. He had done twenty trips, all of them with the same meaning. It was a bright calm day, without cloud, quite warm in the winter sun. There were pools of water here and there on the runways, and looking through the glasses I could see little brushy silver tails spurting up from the wheels of the aircraft as they taxied away.

When I looked into the air, again through the glasses, I saw two aircraft circling round, waiting to formate before setting course. One of them was smoking a little from the outer port engine. The smoking seemed to increase a little and then became black. Suddenly it seemed as if the whole engine burst silently and softly into crimson flower. I kept looking through the glasses, transfixed, but suddenly the aircraft went away behind the hangars as it came down

THAT evening I waited until it was quite dark before going into the town. I went into the bar of the Grenadier and the girl was standing by the bar talking to the barmaid. She was drinking a port while waiting for him to come.

"Hello," she said. Her voice was cold and I knew that she was disappointed.

"Hello. Could you come outside a moment?" I said.

She finished her port and came outside and we stood in the street, in the darkness. Some people went by, shining a torch on the dirty road, and in the light I could see the sleeves of her coat hanging loose, as if she had no arms. I waited until the people had gone by, and then, not knowing how to say it, I told her what had happened. "It wasn't very heroic," I said. "It was damnable luck. Just damnable luck, that's all."

I was afraid she would cry.

She stood still and quite silent. I felt that I had to do something to comfort her and I made as if to take hold of her arm, but I only caught the sleeve, which was dead and empty. I felt suddenly far away from her and as if we had known two different people—almost as if she had not known him at all.

"I'll take you to have a drink," I said.

"No."

"You'll feel better."

"Why did it have to happen?" she said suddenly, raising her voice. "Why did it have to happen?"

"It's the way it often does happen."

"Yes, it's the way it often does happen!" she said. "Is that all you care? Is that all anyone cares? It's the way it happens!"

I did not speak. For a moment I was not thinking of her. I was thinking of a young man in a barber's saloon in Kalgoorlie, about to make the shocking discovery that the world was at war and that he did not know it.

"Yes, it's the way it happens!" she said. I could not see her face in the darkness, but her voice was very bitter now. "In a week nobody will ever know he flew. He's just one of thousands who go up and never come back. I never knew him. Nobody ever knew him. In a week nobody will know him from anyone else. Nobody will even remember him."

For a moment I did not answer. Now I was not thinking of him. I was thinking of the two people who had so bravely and stupidly kept the war from him and then had so bravely and proudly let him go. I was thinking of the farm with the sheep and the eucalyptus trees, the pink and mauve asters and the yellow spring wattle flaming in the sun. I was thinking of the thousands of farms like it, peopled by thousands of people like them: the simple, decent, kindly, immemorial people all over the earth.

"No," I said to her. "There will be many who will remember him."

FREE CHOICE, FREE WORLD

THERE are not and never have been many Russian restaurants in England; but in a corner of a street in the town nearest the aerodrome the Malinovskys have a little eating-place with marble-top tables and huge silver handstand cruets and yellow cane chairs and a smell of fried fish that is the shadow of Russia. Mrs. Malinovsky is from the south, near Kharkov. She is thin and olive-skinned, with black-brown hair and large numb black eyes, and when she speaks she lets fly with excited kindly hands. "What you like? We got soup and hamburger and fried potatoes. Or you like fish? We got nice salmon wid cucumber salad. Is very nice." And then: "But oh, please God when war is over I haff so nice food here, so nice, so nice, so nice, please God!"

When I first saw Mrs. Malinovsky I could not guess her nationality. She might have been Italian. The subject, however, was a delicate one and I did not know how to approach it.

"You haven't lived long in England?" I said at last.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Where you think I from?"

"You might be from anywhere," I said.

"Anywhere?"

"Well, you know," I said, "almost anywhere. From some little country somewhere. From some little country like Lithuania."

"Lithuania?" she said. "Lithuania?" She looked at me with wide still black eyes. "How you know?"

"I don't know."

"How you know I from Lithuania?" she said. "How you know that? I was born in Lithuania! My mother is born in Lithuania! All my family is born there! How you know? How you know?"

I did not know at all how to account for that extraordinary piece of insight on my part.

"I just know," I said.

"Oh dear, oh dear." Mrs. Malinovsky said, laughing and crying. "Is wonderful! Oh dear, oh dear!"

From that moment Mrs. Malinovsky took me to her heart. "You come in Sunday and we have nice food. We have chicken and nice fish and beet soup—"

"Bortsch," I said.

"Bortsch, yes! How you know?"

"Everybody knows bortsch," I said. "Bortsch is Russia. Roast beef is England."

"Oi! Oi!" she said, half crying, half laughing again. "Oi! Oi!" she called back in a loud excited voice into the kitchen behind the restaurant. "Here is a gentleman who like bortsch! You hear?"

"Oi! Oi!" Mr. Malinovsky called. "I hear!"

After that I became, to the Malinovskys, the man who liked bortsch. Whenever I went there Mrs. Malinovsky came into the restaurant wiping her hands on her apron and then throwing them excitedly up into the air and clasping them together. "Oi!" she would call. "Here is the young man from the Air Force! The young man who likes bortsch! You hear?"

"Oi," Mr. Malinovsky would call, "I hear."

But somehow, although I was always the young man who liked bortsch and although Mrs. Malinovsky always said there would be bortsch on Sunday, there never was any bortsch. Either there were no beets or the bortsch had all been eaten or Mrs. Malinovsky had decided to make something else after all. Similarly there was never any chicken; the salmon was always gone; and it was the wrong time of the year for cucumber. And so after a time, faced with nothing but the actual sausage and fried potatoes, I began to feel, as we say, that I had had it with Malinovskys.

Then one day Mrs. Malinovsky asked me a question.

"Do you know Mr. Markus?" she said.

"I didn't know him. I know all about him," I said.

"All about him?" she said. "*All* about him? Then where is he? Where is he now? He used to come in here. Now he doesn't come."

"No," I said.

"Well, why doesn't he come? Isn't he on the station any more? Where is he?"

"We don't know," I said. "He flew his Spitfire into the *Scharnhorst*."

Mrs. Malinovsky was very quiet, holding her hands.

"He was Lithuanian," she said.

"Yes," I said, "the only Lithuanian."

"He was so nice man. I don't believe nice man like that are killed. I don't believe that nice Mr. Markus was killed!" she said. "I don't believe it."

I did not say anything. It is the thing they all say, the things they all believe. In the eyes of those who love them, pilots are never dead. So when Mrs. Malinovsky said: "I believe that nice Mr. Markus is all right," I thought it kinder not to speak.

AFTER that, whenever I went into the Malinovskys' we talked about Mr. Markus. There were things about him that Mrs. Malinovsky did not know, and I told her them. There were things about him I did not know, and Mrs. Malinovsky told them to me. I told her how he was the only Lithuanian in the Air Force, a man from a country not at war. I told her how he had played international football and what a distinguished important diplomatic sort of flier he had been, before the war, in his own country, how he had flown important personages all over Europe and how he had been decorated in every capital, until his tunic looked like a coat of many colours. She told me in turn how he used to come into the restaurant with a young lady and eat the Malinovskys' simple food, and talk, as exiles always talk, of their own country. I told her how he had flown aeroplanes since he was a schoolboy and how, when the war which was not his began, he had gone to France to fly for France, and then how, after France fell, he had come to England to fly for us. I told her what an engaging, temperamental, distinguished person he was, and she told me over and over again how she could not believe he had been killed.

We talked of him so often, she asking me again and again for news and I telling her and really knowing that there was no more news to tell, that I began to see the Malinovskys' handy little restaurant, with its actual sausages and fried potatoes and its bortsch that I never tasted, as a corner of Lithuania in England. I was sure that Markus was dead; Mrs. Malinovsky was sure that he was living. Whichever way it was, I used to get great satisfaction from the very fact that Markus had been with us at all: that as a free man, making a free choice, entering a war that he had no need to enter, he had made the choice he had.

But if I had great satisfaction in Markus, Mrs. Malinovsky had greater faith. And finally one day I was able to go down to the Malinovskys' and see that faith justified.

"I have come to tell you something," I said. "Mr. Markus is all right!"

"Is—is what? Is *all right?*" she said. "Is *all right?*"

"He is a prisoner," I said. "It has just come through."

Now it was Mrs. Malinovsky who could not speak. She stood crying quietly, slowly clasping and unclasping her hands. Whether she was crying for Markus or Lithuania or Russia or simply out of joy I could not tell. It was her great moment and she was very proud. I felt a great satisfaction too. I remembered the last anyone had ever seen of Markus: how he had taken the Spitfire down to nought feet over the *Scharnhorst* and had put her practically down the funnel and was never seen again.

It was a great satisfaction to all of us to know that he had performed a miracle and was alive.

"Oh, please God," Mrs. Malinovsky said, "when war is over we will have bigga celebration! So big, so nice! So nice food! So nice, so nice, so nice, please God!"

And, please God, we will.

YOURS IS *the* EARTH

HE used to fly one of the morning mails to the Continent before the war—a steady and at the same time a shaky job, done in all sorts of weather, that finally built for him a total of three thousand hours. He must have known the way across the Channel as a man knows the way, in light or darkness, up his own garden path. As pilots go he was really quite old too, over thirty, really quite old. He had a wife and family too, and when the Nazis killed them in a blitz, there was no longer anything to be done with him. He became one of those legendary figures that read alone in their rooms and fret to be flying and curse the controller and the weather—one of those who ask only to be free for revenge, who are slightly insane in their desire to equal the score and who are talked about in messes long after they are dead.

They are the sort of individualists—sometimes exiles, sometimes men with lost limits—whom you seem to find always among the night fighters. They are those who, because they have lost countries or limbs or families or perhaps hope, do not want very much to be disciplined. The war for them has become very personal. For them night is more free than day: free darkness, free stars, free moon, free space for the expression of a feud. They find raiders in the moon above low cloud, shadows in the flare of ack-ack and above the glare of ground fires. They are the intruders who look for Christmas trees: the dromes with their landing-light burning and the red and green and yellow eyes of returning planes.

It is often the quietest who hate most, and his reticence was very typical. It really concealed a great ferocity. But when he knocked down eight raiders in one night, he gave all the decoration to the Hurricane. "She'll fly through anything," he said, not then really knowing how true it was.

He did not really know that until one night in the early summer of 1941. That night he chased a Heinkel over France and then stalked it, coming very close. Often it is possible to get a Heinkel with a one-second burst; but though he was very close he pressed the button a little longer. The explosion in the Heinkel was immense. It seemed to lift him out of the sky. He seemed to be projected violently upwards and then fall through the vacuum created by the

explosion down on to a table of flame. He seemed to skid along this surface of flame, seeing it gradually break and rise until it grew into walls of fire about him. This fire, after a few seconds, blinded him, so that for a long time afterward his sight was partially blacked out, his night vision gone. He had only the most confused and painful impression of flying through the flames and out of it and beyond it, upside down.

It was all very fantastic. He flew on for what seemed a long time, practically blind. When his night vision came back at last, he saw oil spurting and streaming all over the cockpit. He knew that he had to get down. He was a very long way from home, and his only hope was a strange aerodrome. He did not know the approaches, but somehow he got down at last, still confused and blinded by that fantastic inverted projection along a table of flame.

The quiet night of the summer seemed fantastic in an opposite way after that. He did not like the nights of inactivity. He was always restless, hating and cursing the weather, the long periods of non-operational calm. He must have felt that it needed many nights, many moons, many lights shaken from the Christmas trees before he could come to within even a remote distance of making his revenge complete, if it could be made complete. He had seen his family deprived of the earth and he must have felt that any night when he did not fly was a whole life of wasted opportunity. It was for this impatient anxiety that there was no discipline. To fly, to kill, to smash the pretty lights on the most sinister of all Christmas trees for God's sake—what had the weather to do with that? Hadn't he flown the mail in all sorts of weather? If you could risk your life to fly to safety the trivial correspondence of peacetime just because somebody was impatient for an answer, then you could fly through hell because you yourself were impatient for an answer that could be given only by you and only in one way.

He went on in this fretful and furious way all summer. "Oh, yes, he was quite mad," they say of him now. "Quite mad." You couldn't tell him what not to do, or if you did he wouldn't do it. He would go off on his own and you couldn't stop him. He was quite mad and he had reason to be. They had already decorated him handsomely; now they decorated him again. But what he needed, all that summer, was not decoration but simply the chance to fly, to kill and blow out a few more lights in the darkness across the water.

The chance did not come until the end of the summer. He was out on the sea beyond the Norfolk coast and they say he actually screamed at the sight of a Heinkel. It was the scream of a man who does not find it possible, even by time and bloodshed, to neutralize a hatred. It was the scream of a whole summer of released fury and boredom and inactivity. He drove the Heinkel inexorably down to sea-level. As it jettisoned its bombs, which threw up huge columns of water, he rose away from these spouts and then when they cleared at last closed in again and opened fire. The moment when the Heinkel struck the sea in clouds of smoke and steam was the moment for which he had waited. It did something to set him free.

They decorated him again for that. And then, as always when fighters become very expert, very successful, and very intent on bloody results, they gave him a special mission.

He went off to do it in the calm twilight of an autumn evening. The time between departure and return, for a Hurricane, is not long. The time went by and the short margin of time behind it went by until it became clear that the anger, the hatred, and the desire for revenge had been dissipated at last.

He is the dead now—you are the living. His was the sky—yours is the earth because of him!

A PERSONAL WAR

HE is a little fellow with an oval head that is quite bald except for a few feathery wisps of grey hair. He has a small tobacco-gold moustache and sharp blue eyes and a way of bowing slightly when he speaks to you, as if he were nothing but the receptionist of a hotel, or a cashier at a bank, or a traveling salesman in toys.

It is not until you look at his hands that you realize that they are not the hands of a man who assigns rooms to guests or counts money or winds up the keys of little engines. They are very short and thick and powerful hands and the fingertips protrude unusually far beyond the small tight nails. Then after you have looked at his hands, which are so small yet so muscular and aggressive, you look back at his face, and you see then that the little stiff moustache and the sharp blue eyes and even the bald grey head are aggressive too, and that even the short and charming bow has another meaning. After talking to him for a little while you realize what this meaning is. He is a traveller in a Stirling, and his toys are guns.

We sit talking for a long time before he tells me this. It is winter and at the moment there are no operations. Still grey mists hang far over the flat land, and pools of yellow mud cover the track along which the bombers are lined up. It has been raining for a long time and there is no wind to drive the mist away.

Suddenly, for no reason, he talks of America.

"You have been there?" I say.

"For a long time," he says. "I was born here, but mostly I have lived there."

"Where?"

"In Texas mostly."

"Which is why they call you Tex?"

"Which is why they call me Tex," he says, with a smile.

"And how," I say, "do you feel about America?"

"America or Americans?"

"Americans."

"Which Americans?" he says.

We both laugh. I look out of the window and watch for a moment the rain dripping down through the mist on the huge iron-coloured wings of the Stirlings, and when I look back at him again, I see that he has stopped laughing and is serious again.

"You think they don't understand?" I say.

"Not only that."

"What else?"

"It's not only time they understood," he says, "it's time they got good and angry too."

"Like you?"

"A bit more like me," he says.

He smiles and we sit without talking for a little while and I watch his hands. He has a way of crooking the fingers of his right hand into the fingers of the left, and then pulling them, as if they were triggers. Finally I ask him if he will have a drink; and with a charming smile but without uncrooking his hands he says: "Possibly. Thank you. Possibly I will. It is very kind of you. Thank you."

"What will it be?"

"Thank you," he says, "a beer."

When the beer comes I ask him what it is like up there in the rear turret on ops.—if he gets bored or tired or very cold; and he says: "No. Only just angry. Very good and angry all the time." I listen and soon he goes on to tell me about the flak: how it seems to come up slowly, very slowly, as if it will never climb into the darkness.

"Very bad too?"

"Not at all polite," he says.

"And in Texas," I say, "—what were you doing there?"

"Sheriff."

"Gun and all?"

"Why, sure," he says, "gun and all. Notches and all."

So he goes on to tell me about the life in Texas, the life of a boy's dream:

the gun and the notches, the sheriff and the posse, the remote, enormous country. As he talks I try to see the life as something real, but it unfolds itself to me only like a series of glimpses into a dusky unreality. I cannot believe in the gun, the little sheriff's office in the little town, the dusty plains, the posse, and the notches whittled on the gun-stock. I cannot believe in the life of his America any more than he can understand, now, the minds of so many who go on living it.

So we talk about flying again. He has not flown for a week, and as I look at him I see that the small blue eyes are sharp and fretful with impatience as much as with anger. "My God, if I don't soon fly," he says, "I'll be swinging on the bloody chandelier."

He finishes the beer. "You will have another? Please. This time on me?"

I thank him, and when the beer comes he talks a little more. There is a medal ribbon on his chest. It seems more real than the notches in the gun, but I do not ask about it. Instead he tells me about a time when they stooged above the *Scharnhorst* at Brest. It was the day they scored a hit, and he talks for a time about this, casually, without anger, as if it were an afternoon picnic. It is as though battleships were impersonal things and I know suddenly that what he likes is the personal feeling about it all: the feeling of cold isolation in the rear turret, the sight of the flak climbing up in the darkness in slow coloured curls, the feeling of his own thick powerful hands on the guns.

I know that this is what he likes, but I still do not understand why he likes it. I do not understand why he likes it more than the life of a sheriff in a little Texas town, with his posse and his gun and the notches on the gun, as if he were a hero in a film. I do not understand why he has left that life, to fly in a country that is only half his own. I do not understand why he does not remain, like so many others, isolated, apart, away from it all.

And finally I ask him.

"You really like it up there, don't you?" I say.

"Like it?"

"Yes."

For a moment he does not speak. Then he looks at me with a fierce little smile, his fingers tightly crooked into each other, his eyes screwed up, hard and intense.

"Like it?" he says. There is nothing of the receptionist or the bank cashier or the traveller in toys about him now. He is far removed even from the little sheriff in the little Texas town. His eyes are furious and the smile in his face is quite deadly. He is caught up by a raw hatred of someone or something that is almost sublime and he no longer leaves me in any doubt as to who it is.

"Like it? I was just born with a natural hatred of those swabs. I was born with it and all my life I've been living to work it off. Like it?" he says. "It's a personal argument with me. It's a personal war!"

Now I understand, and suddenly I feel quite small and there is nothing I can say.

I can only look out of the windows at the huge dark Stirlings shining dully on the perimeter in the rain, and hope that soon there will be a wind that will drive the mist away.

THERE'S NO FUTURE *in* IT

THE nights he was not flying they would drive back late to the station, using her car. The flarepath would be laid; the lights on the hangars would shine like red stars in the winter darkness above the flat land. Sometimes the searchlights would be up, throwing a blue-white fire that fell widely like moonlight on the dark trees and hedges and on the winding road. They would sit in the car and, holding each other, talk for a long time. Frost on the very coldest nights would form like a silver collar on the glass of the windscreen and sometimes, on very still nights, he would wind down the window of the car and listen for a moment or two to the silence outside. She would lean her head on his shoulder and look upwards into the dark sky and then, listening too, hear the sound of the bombers coming home.

It did not seem to matter much that they were never likely to be married. He was rather small and compact, with fresh grey eyes that he sometimes did not seem able to focus correctly. He had thirty-one operational trips to his credit, and all that seemed to matter was that he should continue coming back.

The morning afterwards, perhaps, he would ring the office. He would say simply: "Hello, dear, tonight." She would try to remain calm, and later, perhaps, if operations were scrubbed, he would ring her again and she would find herself trembling as she put down the telephone, all her pretence of calmness gone.

She knew generally that he would be briefed in the early afternoon. He would take off about three o'clock or a little later and, according to the target, come back somewhere between eight and ten. It would often be too late to ring her after interrogation, but going to bed she would try to lie awake for the sound of the telephone. Sometimes she would fall asleep with the light still burning and would wake up in the small hours of the morning, bewildered and startled, not knowing where she was. Twice she fell half asleep and did not hear the telephone. Downstairs her father heard it, but after answering it, did not come to tell her who it was.

Her father was a rather big, grey-haired man with cheeks like loose pink rubber. He rolled his own cigarettes and it seemed to her that she never saw him without a newspaper. He rolled the cigarettes very badly—the tobacco fell wastefully on his clothes. The war had developed in him the latent qualities of the amateur strategist, and he always discussed the war while waving an untidy, wasteful cigarette. "We ought to have cut the Tripoli road long ago. Long ago. You have only to look at the map. The same with the bombing of Berlin. What's gone wrong? Why aren't we over there more? Why aren't we over there night after night? Striking early and often is the decisive factor. You'd suppose it wouldn't escape our people."

"Perhaps it's the weather," she would say.

"Weather? There's another thing that beats me. Argue on simple lines, draw some absolutely logical conclusion which ought to be apparent to the merest child, and you always get the same answer. The weather! I don't doubt the weather is sometimes bad. But far from always, far from always. It's too often a convenient excuse—like the workman blaming his tools."

"Nevertheless it nearly always is the weather."

"Oh? Then what about last night? Clear moonlight like day. And was there a single operation? A couple of bombers over Brest."

"You talk as if Brest were a seaside resort."

"Look at the weather again tonight. Magnificent. And in the morning what shall we hear? The same old story again, I suppose. A handful of bombers over Brest. Or nothing at all."

"It's probably the most heavily defended place in Europe," she said. "It's just plain hell."

"Kitty, Kitty," her mother said. She looked up from her knitting, always khaki, and looked down again.

"Also I think you may find that tonight has been a big thing."

"Oh! You know, do you?"

"No. Not exactly. I've an idea, that's all."

"Ah! Your pilot friend."

She did not speak.

"You haven't brought him in lately."

"No, dear," her mother said.

"They spend most of their time out," her father said. "Somewhere."

Her mother spoke without looking up from her knitting.

"Were you at the Red Lion last week?" her mother said. "We heard you were there. Drinking with Air Force officers."

"I was."

"Is that the kind of place to be?" her father said.

"Drinking," her mother said. "It's not nice. Do you think so?"

"I want to be wherever he is."

"Even there? Couldn't you give him up?" her mother said. "He struck me as being older than he said. Do you know much about him? You are only twenty. It's all so terribly unsure. Perhaps he is married. Do you know?"

She did not answer.

"He looks older than twenty-four," her mother said. "Experienced. His eyes look old."

She got up, calmly enraged, definite. "He has done things that make him old," she said, and went out of the room.

The following night they drove back late to the station. With the moon rising and the searchlights up, the road shone misty white between the dark hedges. The evening lay behind them, as always, simply secure; a few rounds of light ale at the Red Lion, the boys coming in group by group, the rounds growing, the crews mixing, sergeants with squadron leaders, gunners with navigators, warm broad Canadian voices mingled with English; and then the drive home, the blue lighting of the searchlights, and the moonlight throwing into relief the black winter trees, the hangars lit by red stars, the huge solitary dispersed aircraft in the fields; and lastly the silence after the car had stopped beyond the gate of the station.

"Was it a good trip, darling?"

He did not answer.

"Bad?"

"Pretty bad."

"Did you have trouble?"

"The usual. Ten tenths most of the way and then some hellish flak."

She thought of her father. She saw him in an armchair, rolling the cigarettes, waving a newspaper. "Always the weather!"

"I'm sorry I couldn't ring," he said. "It was late when we got in for interrogation. I didn't want to wake you."

"I was awake," she said.

They sat still, not speaking. She thought again of her father.

"Tell me about the trip."

"Nothing to tell. Routine stuff."

She did not like the sound of his voice, tired and guarded; the feeling that part of him was deliberately withheld.

"I can tell when you have trouble."

"What trouble? No trouble at all."

"Why have you got your hand in your pocket?" she said. "You've had it there all the time."

"All right," he said.

HE began suddenly to tell her something about the trip. Though she had heard so much of it before, the awful significance of it was not lessened. He told her about the weather; ten tenths, a bad storm soon after they turned for home, a spot of ice. "They put up a hell's own flak at us. Just routine stuff, only a bloody sight worse. And they hit my hand. Took the skin off, that's all." He kept it in his pocket.

She knew that he was not telling everything, that he never did, perhaps never would. Routine stuff, hellish flak, a spot of ice; the same words, the same repeated demand on courage, on fear if you like, the same holding back. She thought once more of her father: the world of the newspaper, the protest, the old indignations. To contrast it with the world of flak and ice, the long darkness of endurance, the spell of cold and strain thirty-one times repeated, was so difficult and angrily confusing that she said only: "Does your hand hurt? Can I do anything for you?"

"Thanks, darling, I'm O.K."

She remembered something.

"What time did interrogation finish? Why were you so late?"

"It wasn't so late. Not so very late."

"If it wasn't so late, why didn't you ring me?"

"I didn't want to wake you."

"Tell me what happened," she said.

He looked beyond the car window and said: "We got a bit shot up. Just one of those things."

"Bad?"

"Bad enough. A lump of flak blew a hole as big as a cartwheel in the starboard wing and the transmitter was u.s. Shaky landing. But why pick on me? It happens every day."

"Not to you."

"It happens," he said.

"You hate it, don't you?" she said.

"Hate what?" he said.

"You hate going, don't you, time after time? The same place. The same job. The same everything. I know you hate it."

"I hate it like hell," he said. He looked beyond the car window again. The diffused lighting of the searchlights and the cloudy moon shone on the misted windscreen. The trees were black against it. "But I hate what they're doing even more. That's what I really hate. What they do to me isn't half of what I mean doing to them. Not half. Not a quarter. Not a hundredth part. Is there anything wrong about hatred?"

She was thinking of her father, fussy with indignation, and she did not answer.

"It's good honest downright emotion, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes."

"Sometimes I think we want more of it," he said. "God, sometimes I think we do."

When at last she drove back from the station it was later than she thought. But at the house, to her surprise, her father and mother were still up. Her mother looked up from her knitting and her father looked at his watch

"Either my watch is fast or it's ten past twelve."

She did not speak.

"Even the Red Lion closes at ten."

"It so happens I haven't been there."

Her father coughed heavily. "Does your pilot friend realize that we sit here waiting?"

She did not answer.

"We have a right to be considered."

She stood slowly taking off her gloves.

"You'll agree that he owes us something, won't you?"

SHE stood thinking of the long flight in darkness, the hellish flak, the hole in the wing, the shell through the fuselage, the shaky landing; routine stuff; easy, nothing to tell, something done again and again. Her mind became unsteady with hatred. She looked at her mother. The clean prejudiced hands were motionless on the knitting. Her father with the evening newspaper folded between his fingers stood with his back to the dying fire.

"Is he married?" her mother asked.

"Does it matter?" she said.

Her father crackled the newspaper.

"My dear child, my dear child! Does it matter? I ask you. What about the future? Is there any future in that?"

"No," she said; "there's no future in it."

She wanted to go on speaking, but her thoughts were disrupted and dispersed in the corners of her mind and she could not gather them together. She wanted to say why there was no future. She wanted to tell them about the flak, the darkness, and the bitter cold, about the way the tracer bullets came in at you so slowly that you could watch them until suddenly they hurled with red frenzy past your face, about the hatred and the monotony and the courage that was greater because it was rarefied by terror. She

wanted to tell them that if there was any future it lay through this.

She went out of the room and went upstairs instead. She felt stifled by the warmth of the room downstairs and, not putting on the light, she opened the window and stood looking out. The air was bright with frost, and the coldness struck with a momentary shock on her face and hands.

She stood there for a long time, looking out. The moon was going down beyond the houses. The searchlights were no longer up beyond the town. The sky was clear and calm, and, as if there were no war and as it might be in the future, if there were a future, there was no sound of wings.

THERE'S SOMETHING *in the* AIR

ALL that spring and summer we lived in a big old cream house surrounded by trees that lay under the downs within sight of the sea. . . . On hot clear days the sea-light over the sea made the high clouds like ripples of snow and the barrage balloons of passing ships melted into the sky like big bubbles of shining cloud.

Neither Anderson nor Auerbach got up till twelve. Because they were night fighters their night was day, and part of their day was night, and in this and a few other simple facts they were alike, doing the same things. The few simple facts were that they flew Hurricanes, belonged to the same squadron, were very volatile, and had shot down very many aircraft by night. But in everything else it seemed to me they had nothing in common at all.

Anderson was English; Auerbach was Czech. Anderson was about six feet two, but Auerbach was a little man about five feet and a half. Anderson had gone practically straight from school to fly, but Auerbach had first to escape from Czechoslovakia down into the Mediterranean and through North Africa and so to France before he was able to reach England. Anderson, very fair and fresh-faced, with a small corn-brown moustache, looked rather aristocratic in a manner that could not have been anything else but English. His moustache alone was an emblem, plain as the Union Jack. But Auerbach did not look particularly Czech or, though his ancestors had been notable military people, particularly aristocratic. He did not look particularly anything. He had in him something of the element of the anonymous peasant. In his tender, crafty, smiling blue eyes there was a profound watchfulness. It was the sort of look that might have been inherited from generations of people perpetually wondering how long the things they possess are going to remain their own. They are watching to see that they are not cheated. That look sometimes made Auerbach, in spite of a sort of cunning vivacity, look quite old.

In many other things Anderson and Auerbach were not the same. Anderson was very much the young blood whose life was split fairly evenly between flying and girls, and his leaves were beautiful and wild. Auerbach had married an English girl and was now a settled man. He sometimes looked rather shy, and there was a record of how once, before he was married, he had taken a girl out for the evening and how, in the darkness, coming home, he had kissed her on the forehead.

All that late spring and early summer Anderson and Auerbach flew together. It was one of those periods in a station when the unity and life of a good squadron becomes too strong to remain a local thing, compressed within itself, meaning something to only a few people. It breaks out, and spreading, warm and energetic and fluid, becomes a large thing, meaning something to many people. It was one of those periods when everything was good. The weather was good and calm and sunny, the sealight lofty and pure over the sea by day. The nights were good and starry, with no ground mist and just the right cover of cloud. The squadron was good and proud and knew itself. The things it did were good and the news of its doings were in the papers. Whenever you came into the mess or the billiard-room or the dining-room and heard laughter boiling over too richly you knew it was that squadron laughing. You knew by their laughter that they wanted nothing else than to be kept as they were, flying by night together, shooting up trains on the flat lands of northern France, shooting down careless Dorniers over their own aerodromes. They had found each other. The positive and exuberant feeling of their discovery spread over the station, from Erks to W.A.A.F.'s and from W.A.A.F.'s to officers, until all of us felt it there.

But the best of all that feeling came from Anderson and Auerbach. Every night Anderson and Auerbach flew out over northern France, separately, to wait for enemy bombers coming home from raids in England. And every morning, when we came down to breakfast, long before Anderson and Auerbach were up, we heard only one question. It was not, "What is there for breakfast?" or "What is in the papers?" as if we had any fond ideas that either would be any different from the morning before, but only "How many did Anderson and Auerbach shoot down?"

When that spring began Anderson and Auerbach had each shot down nine aircraft, all by day. The weather in the winter had been very bad. The long period of inaction began to be broken in the month of April. It had then been a long time since either Anderson or Auerbach had shot anything down. Now they began to shoot something down almost every night. It struck me that what they were doing was very like poaching: something of the same instinct took them alone, across channel, to roam craftily above the dromes of northern France, waiting for stray victims. It was only in the way they did this that they seemed, as always and in almost everything else, very different. Anderson's way was to choose an aerodrome and fly to it and impatiently fly around it, waiting for the drome lights to be switched on and watching for the navigation light of returning bombers. If the light did not come on very soon, he lost eagerness and flew away to another drome, always impatient and volatile and eager until something happened, always furious and blasphemous when nothing did.

But all that Auerbach did was to wait. Auerbach had patience. It was the patience of craftiness: of the man who sits above a rabbit hole, waiting to strike. Auerbach had come through Czechoslovakia and the Mediterranean and North Africa and France for the purpose of striking, and now, as I looked at it, a few moments more waiting would not matter. So it was Anderson, they said, who had the brilliance and Auerbach, they said, who had the luck; whereas it was really only the difference between a man who had infinite patience and one who had none at all.

So almost every morning, by one or two and sometimes three aircraft, we heard that Anderson and Auerbach had raised the score; and almost every noon I used to see Anderson and Auerbach themselves, getting up after their late sleep. What they told me and the way they told it was, as always, very different.

ABOUT noon Auerbach was always in the billiard-room. He was not particularly good, but he played like a clown in a circus and there was always a crowd watching him. He had a droll and magnetic way of laughing, and the laughter in the billiard-room used to bubble over when Auerbach was there.

"Nice going," I would say. "What were they?"

"I think all Dornier 217's. I'm not sure. Perhaps one Heinkel 111."

"Very nice."

"Peez of cake."

Every noon, while Auerbach was playing billiards, Anderson was on the

terrace of the house, sun-bathing, alone. Auerbach used to say very little. He used to give a wink and a nod and a flick of his thumb and it was an understanding between us: the common language that needed no elaboration. But Anderson, lying back on the cream stone terrace, eyes shaded against the sun, his moustache looking more corn-brown and more English than ever against his naked body, liked to talk about what happened. "Yes, and Auerbach got three! Two Dorniers and a Heinkel and a probable, the sod. God, he has the luck. There I stayed over the same drome for twenty minutes and not a sausage. Five minutes after I leave it Auerbach comes and they light up the whole bloody Christmas tree."

"Luck," I said.

"Luck, hell," he said. "He's got some sixth sense or something. He knows which bloody drome they'll use and when they'll use it."

"Just crafty," I said. "You can see it in his eyes."

"Crafty as hell," he said.

"And you?" I said. "I hear you got one."

"One solitary 217. They switched all the bloody drome lights on and there they were, as big as hell, about a dozen of them. Then as soon as I hit him they put everything out and I was finished."

"You must be equal with Auerbach now," I said.

"No, he's one up on me. The lucky sod, he's always one up on me."

"Tomorrow you'll probably get six."

"Me?" he said. "The only time I ever see six is when the bloody ammo runs out."

WHAT he said turned out to be true. Next night he saw twenty and the light of the drome and the lights of the bombers were like the lights of a party round a Christmas tree. Anderson went in with great excitement and began to line them up. He hit the first Dornier at only a hundred feet, and she blew up underneath him almost before he had time to pull out of the dive. There is something about being hit at a hundred feet which does not seem to be in the rules, and the confusion must have been very great. The lights of the drome continued to burn as brilliantly as ever and the lights of the incoming bombers were not switched off. All Anderson had to do was to turn and come in again and hit a Heinkel. He saw it crash in wreaths of orange fire in the black space beyond the circle of light. Then he hit another and he saw it, too, burning among the lights, as if something in the Christmas tree had fallen and caught fire. Even then the lights of the drome still kept burning and the bombers circled round like coloured fireflies. It was all so fantastic, with the red and white light shining in the darkness and the coloured lights moving in the sky and the orange fires breaking the darkness, that Anderson could not believe it to be true. It was only when he had the fourth bomber lined up and pressed the tit and nothing happened except a fraction of a second burst that he knew the ammo was spent and it was real after all.

I do not know how many Auerbach got that night, but by the end of May he and Anderson were still almost equal, and by the beginning of June what they did was in the papers every day. The papers had their photographs too, and I suppose the photographs were something like them. But what the papers printed was really a comic story. It was the story of two men with eagle eyes, though sometimes it was cat's eyes and sometimes it was hawk's eyes, who stalked over France every night in the darkness. We liked especially the word "stalk," since it is the one thing an aeroplane does not do, and thinking of the clear, youthful, exuberant eyes of Anderson and of the crafty, friendly blue eyes of Auerbach, we liked the nonsense about the eyes. From the newspapers you got the impression that Anderson and Auerbach were a pair of very heroic bandits who behaved with copybook courage and were in some way supernatural. This attitude was perhaps excusable, since the newspapers never saw Anderson lying naked in the sun, blaspheming about the luck of Auerbach, or Auerbach playing snooker, with a laughing audience who got more fun out of Auerbach potting the black than they got out of his putting a Heinkel down.

It was excusable because, after all, the newspapers could not know the feeling that comes from a squadron which is at the crest of things: the warm and positive excitement that we felt all that spring and which went on expanding and flowing outward all that summer. They did not know about Auerbach playing billiards and comic games of snooker, or about his kissing a girl on the forehead in the dark. They did not know about Anderson lying on his back in the sun and looking at the green summer leaves and the green grass spreading to the foot of the dark hills, and saying, a little solemnly, because this was his first year in England since the war began: "You can't believe how bloody wizard it is. You can't know what it is to see the leaves so green in the trees."

THERE seemed no reason why this feeling and this squadron, and above all why Anderson and Auerbach, should not have gone on forever. There seemed no reason why Anderson and Auerbach should ever stop those simple and disastrous journeys over France. But there comes a time when every squadron is held to have earned its rest; when some obscure department somewhere, by something written in a paper, breaks a tension and a feeling that can never be put on paper at all.

And finally it was time to say goodbye on an evening in July. The weather had broken suddenly and the wind blew cold and gusty between the dispersal huts on the drome, raising dry clouds of sand. The Hurricanes were lined along the perimeter. The pilots were not very happy, but they pretended to be very happy and the sergeant pilots fondled the busts of each other's Mae Wests and said heavy farewells. There were many people there to say good-bye. We shook hands with everybody again and wished them luck, and then the take-off was delayed and we shook hands with everyone again. We all promised to write and knew that we should never keep the promises. Anderson addressed the pilots in language as if they were going to play football, and we all said good-bye once more. Then for the second time the take-off was delayed and the little W.A.A.F.'s who had at last begun to dry their tears began to cry all over again.

IT was only when the take-off had begun at last that I realized Auerbach was not there. Auerbach was going one way, the squadron another. Auerbach had not come to say goodbye. The Hurricanes flew once round the drome, in two flights of six, black against the grey evening sky, gradually formating. The little W.A.A.F.'s cried a little harder and the wind blew a little harder in a grey wave over the leaves of the potato patch beside the hut. I lifted my hand and drove away.

At the mess I found Auerbach alone. The anteroom was almost empty and there was no one laughing in the billiard-room.

"You didn't come," I said to him.

"No."

"You don't like good-byes," I said.

"No." He looked at me with the tender and now serious blue eyes that the newspapers had been vainly trying for weeks to describe. "No. I do not like fuss," he said. "No fuss."

I did not say anything. I walked away and into the garden. The grass and the leaves and the meadows under the hills were still green, but it was no longer the wonderful green of early summer. I walked across the grass and looked up at the empty sky and realized suddenly that something had gone.

All summer there had been something in the air. It was there no longer now.

The Last Voyage of

A strange story of the sea today

by Samuel Taylor



I WANT to tell you about the sinking of the *San Salvadore*, simply to put the record straight. The fact that I know nothing at all about ships is in my favor as a reporter. I can give you the facts uncluttered by the sentimental superstitions that seem to cling to an old ship. The *San Salvadore* was merely an assortment of planks and timbers shaped into a design called a ship, and to assume that this ship would have not only a personality but something akin to human emotions and reactions is as patently preposterous—to a landlubber such as myself—as it would be to attribute human feelings to a boxcar, a barn, a tavern or a bridge that might have been made with those same planks and timbers. I admit the facts of the last voyage are unusual. But they are not, I maintain, subject to a supernatural explanation. . . .

The Germans were bombing the wharves when I came aboard at the start of the ill-fated voyage. There was a terrific clatter from the ack-ack guns, and filling the night sky was the undulating *whoom-whoom-whoom* of the Luftwaffe. As the bombs came down you would listen tensely at the whistle, and then either flop flat or relax, as the case might be. The falling shell fragments made a metallic rain. A big wharf was burning, lighting up the scene. Some fire-fighting boats, three of them, were playing water on the blaze, which was feeding at a big pile of crated war goods. The bombs were throwing up pillars of water in the harbor, and adjoining the burning wharf—directly across from it, that is—was the *San Salvadore*, with her high masts and furled sails red in the fire. And this is how I first saw her, an anachronism—more properly, perhaps, an atavism, a survival of a more primitive and, we like to think, less vicious day. The masts were rocking as the water churned with the bombs. A figure on the bridge was yelling curses, and figures ran around in the firelight; a little tug had arrived and a line was being made fast.

"I'm Allen!" I kept yelling from the wharf.

"Shut up, you!" the man on the bridge yelled. He had a long bony

the Unsinkable *Sal*

face, and he shouted past a straight-stemmed pipe. Then he remembered his lone passenger. "Oh, Allen! Well, come on aboard! We've got to get out of here before we're burned up!"

"How do I get aboard?" I yelled.

But the captain had turned his attention elsewhere. The fire on the adjoining wharf was rising high, leaping high enough for me to see it over the bulk of the ship. A bomb whistled close, too close. Hawsers were being cast off. If I was going with that ship I'd have to get aboard in a hurry. I had a Gladstone and a portable

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward



typewriter. I made a beautiful throw with the Gladstone, but it hit the rigging and fell back into the water. I looped my belt through the handle of my portable case and began climbing out on a hawser, upside down like a sloth, with my face turned up in that rain of ack-ack fragment. And then just as I reached the ship and thought I'd made it, I saw a man waiting aboard with a long knife in his hand. He was waiting for me to get close enough.

"Stow that shiv, dumb-chum!" I yelled alarmedly. "And give me a hand!"

"Mr. Livingston, I do presume!" he cried. "An American!" He closed the knife and gave me a hand. "I thought you was one of them sabotage guys sneaking aboard."

"I'm Allen. I'm the passenger."

"Oh, yeah, the newspaper guy," he said. "When you write up the story, remember to spell my name with two *n's*—Jennkins. Jess Jennkins."

"Show me my cabin, you fool."

"Don't get tough, chesty."

"Show me my cabin," I said; "I'm going to be sick in a hurry."

AND so I was flat on my back and wishing I was dead, when we started this last voyage of the *San Salvadore*. Ships always affect me like this, which I suppose is one reason I hold no romantic nonsense about them. Even a ferry-boat makes me green; though curiously enough a small craft such as a rowboat doesn't affect me. This was my first venture on a sailing-ship, and I hope my last. There may be nothing more beautiful than an old windjammer booming along under full sail, but it's quite another thing to be inside the creaking old crate as she smashes head-on into the seas, groaning and cracking and wheezing. And as if that weren't bad enough, we ran into a storm the second day out.

The old tub wallowed along like a hog drunk on sour mash, reeling back and forth, floundering and recovering. There wasn't a single joint on her that didn't make its own particular squeak or groan or sigh, and whenever

the wind ceased screaming a moment there was the clank of the pumps to remind you that the sea was going to win out one of these times, maybe this one. The storm kept up all day and all night, and by morning when the wind was dying down I sensed a new quality in the vessel's pitch and roll; it seemed now that there was a soggy deliberation to its motion.

"GOOD morning, chum," Jennkins said, entering in dripping oilskins. "How'd you like a nice juicy pork chop swimming in grease?"

"They used to take a man like you and wind his small intestine onto a winch," I said when I could speak again.

"I told 'em you wouldn't want anything to eat; but orders is orders. Getting some good material for your story?"

"Sure. Through the sub pack on a windjammer. Red sails against the sunset. Get out of here."

"I've read some of your stuff," he said, sitting down on my bunk. "I think it's swell."

"I do my best," I said modestly, warming to him.

"I like that Washington stuff."

"I'm not Pearson and Allen; I'm the Rolling-stone Allen; I do a travel column for small-town papers."

"Never heard of you, and I come from a small town. Seventy-three people."

"That's *too* small."

"You're fussy who reads your stuf, aren't you?"

"Look; do you want to scram and let me suffer in solitude?"

"Okay, chum. But I'm to tell you to keep your life-preserver on, just in case."

"In case of what?"

"Guess," he said. "Listen, chum, if it was any ship but the 'Unsinkable Sal,' I'd say we were sinking."

With those cheery words Jennkins left me. I lay there listening to the clank of the pumps as the wind eased down fitfully to a steady breeze while the day wore on. I had no faith in the legend of the "Unsinkable Sal," as seamen called the *San Salvadore*. If the legends of near-miracles were true, the stories of how this vessel should have sunk, but hadn't, half a dozen times or so through the years—then all the more reason why she was overdue to go down, in my way of thinking. The law of averages would say that much. And so she wallowed along with that peculiar deliberate sluggishness of motion throughout the day; but I fancied along in the afternoon that she was a bit more like a ship and a bit less like a soggy log. This was perhaps wishful thinking. And it is true that a sick man will fancy himself better simply because he becomes accustomed to his illness.

And then along about sunset Jennkins stuck his head in the door. He had a squarish, unimaginative face.

"No, I don't want any pork chops," I said.

"This is it, chum," he said, his voice flat and low. "A German sub is standing by. They've give us ten minutes."

"I thought they didn't do that any more," I said, speaking lightly because the thing was too sudden to grasp immediately.

"All right, go up and argue with the Nazi commander," Jennkins said. "Ten minutes, remember."

He dodged out, and I got to my feet. I was weak as a kitten, and my knees gave way. I struck my head against the corner of the chair, and this steadied me somehow. I staggered out on deck with my portable typewriter, out onto the eternal ceaselessly moving deck, and I'm telling you the truth that the prospect of getting free of the confounded ship seemed almost pleasant. A sub was standing by a short way off, with a crew manning a deck gun and somebody at the conning-tower with a machine-gun in case any of us tried to get foolish with a revolver or rifle. The old windjammer obviously was unarmed, and I suppose the sub didn't want to waste a torpedo on her. The crew of the *San Salvadore* was preparing to abandon ship, working in a silent dazed way. The captain stood with feet braced and his teeth set on the bit of his straight-stemmed pipe. This was the first time I'd seen him since the night I came aboard.

"I'll take that, Mr. Allen," he said quietly, relieving me of my portable and tossing it overboard. "Now, go back to your cabin and get your overcoat. And where in eternity is your life-preserver?"



I got my overcoat and slicker and life-preserver, and got into a lifeboat with the captain. And as we pulled away from the *San Salvadore* she was low in the water, and with her pumps stilled was settling gradually into the sea. The sharp corklike bobbing of the lifeboat made me feel better almost immediately. By the time we'd pulled fifty yards away I felt well enough that I began worrying about being adrift.

"I hope they don't use that machine-gun on us," Jennkins said.

"You don't believe that sort of propaganda?" I said.

"Of course not, chum. But I've already had one ship shot out from under me in this war, and they machine-gunned us in the boats. Three of us came out alive."

The men stopped rowing, and we sat watching. The spars of the ship were red in the setting sun. She was taking water in every seam, and I wondered if the sub would let her die or would insist on shelling her as she stood helpless like a condemned prisoner against a wall. Duly discounting all the romantic nonsense, she'd had a career worthy of a better end; I had, of course, looked up her history.

THE *Sigismund* was a training-ship for naval cadets under Kaiser Wilhelm II, and the young hopefuls who were going to wrest control of the seas from Britain had trained on her, starting with sail—which some say is the only way thoroughly to understand steam and oil. Then came Jutland, and the German fleet went into harbor for the duration; and aside from the submersibles the Huns—as we called them then—had only their raiders, who relied upon speed and guile and disguise and trickery. The *Sigismund* was sent out to this duty, a sailing ship like Luckner's notorious *Seeadler*. But under Captain von Helm, the *Sigismund* gained none of the fame of Luckner's clipper raider, nor its booty. Circumstance was against it. This, I claim, is the explanation, and there is no use romancing about the so-called pride of a ship, which would imply that the *Sigismund*, whose job had been to train and harden and make seamen of the future commanders of her country's navy, was above stooping to the disguises and treachery of a raider.

It is preposterous to believe that the ship itself felt this indignity and purposely betrayed itself, and that she fought the helm when fleeing from the British cruisers which came in answer to the call of her intended victim. Even supposing for the sake of argument that a ship did have feelings, why would it want to die fighting



"Get your overcoat," he said. "And where in eternity is your life-preserver?"

a couple of modern cruisers, when it might escape? Too, a sailing-ship cannot, except with miraculous luck, escape two cruisers who know her position.

When she was cornered, there was of course but one thing to do—scuttle her, blow out her heart and let her die. This is only common sense in war, to keep matériel from the enemy, even aside from a sea captain's desire to give his ship an honorable death rather than let her be taken captive.

NOBODY knows why the *Sigismund* wasn't scuttled. The commander, Von Helm, devoted a whole chapter to the subject in the book he wrote later. His main argument was that there wasn't time, which is a feeble excuse. He probably was simply afraid for his hide, afraid he and the crew would be left to swim for it if he cheated the British of their prize. He was, of course, judging them by his own standards. Afterward, Von Helm knew he'd disgraced himself, and the entire reason for his book was a matter of futile self-defense. He could have at least saved his ship from becoming a tool in the employ of the enemy.

This is the factual account of the capture of the *Sigismund*. Certainly Von Helm was disgraced. But a ship is without human passions, and I frankly do not believe that the prize crew found her suddenly heavy at the wheel, a dull and sullen ship where she'd been smart and spanking for the Germans. This is more of Von Helm's romancing.

The prize crew had been aboard less than a week when a German submarine tried to do what Von Helm hadn't done, and torpedoed her. But part of her disguise as a raider had been a cargo of lumber, and she made port under her own sail, her decks awash. She wasn't worth repairing, except that it was wartime, and the U-boat campaign was threatening to starve England; so they patched her up and sent her out again.

A subsequent history in detail would be only a chronicle of accident and near-disaster. She ran aground off Rhode Island. Saved, a gale dismasted her. Repaired, she was torpedoed again, in the English Channel this time, during a stiff wind while on the starboard tack; and as the story goes, her crew heeled her over hard to port, clapped on every rag of sail and ran in that way with the gaping hole in her side lifted above the water line. And after the war, trying to compete with steam, running without insurance or repair, there were a dozen times when it seemed she'd seen her final day.

BUT somehow she always pulled through. The English had rechristened her the *Salute*, and seamen called her the "Unsinkable Sal." A superstition grew that the ship wouldn't sink until her business was done: a proud ship that had been disgraced, she would redeem herself. Frankly, this sort of romancing gags me.

Surely if there really was anything in such a story, the ship would not have endured the indignity that next was heaped upon her. After being dismasted once more, while beating around the Horn,—tossing helpless among the rocks and shoals, with the crew living in the lifeboats and ready to leave on the instant,—she survived to be towed in, to have her splintered masts sawed down to stumps, to be given a coat of yellow paint and the name *Whoopee,* and to be moored off Santa Monica as a floating night-club for the venturesome.

There finally came another war and there was a desperate scramble for bottoms; soon, as the *San Salvadore,* she put out to sea under clean new sail, with food again in the hold for the British.

And now she'd been returning from her third trip to Liverpool, and her luck had run out at last. A U-boat was standing by and we'd taken to the lifeboats. The previous day's storm had opened her seams, and now with the pumps stilled she was filling, and settling low in the water.

THE captain, at the tiller of the boat I was in, watched the U-boat's trained gun-crew go through its smooth coördinated precision; I thought he'd bite the stem of his pipe clean in two.



"But maybe it's better," Jennkins murmured, watching the hulk of the dying ship, red against the setting sun. A soft sighing wheeze came from her, like the labored breathing of a person's last minutes. "She'd sooner be sunk than just to go down."

The German crew trained the gun, and waited for the order to fire. Two officers were standing by, a young man with a blunt beefy face, and a lean one, older, with a fringe of gray showing below his cap. The younger one looked to the older one for the command. But the commanding officer had his glasses trained on the ship.

He spoke a sudden word.

"He told them to hold fire," Jennkins said wonderingly. Then he said, "My mother was German and we talked it around the house. She never did learn much English." As if it were necessary for a man who was abandoning his second ship to the Germans to explain why he knew the tongue.

I looked at the captain, and thought I saw an eyebrow raise a bit on his long bony face. He didn't take his gaze from the sub commander.

BRONZED by the sun, the trained Nazi gun-crew were like group statuary as they remained waiting for the order to fire. Their commander was peering through his glasses at details of the old windjammer, though every stick and line was visible to the naked eye.

"I guess he's spotted her," Jennkins said. "He's recognized her for the old *Sigismund.* He's gray-headed—he's old enough. Betcha he trained on her. And now he's got to send her to the bottom. —Hey, Allen, this is swell stuff for your newspaper stories."

"That's enough, Jennkins," said the captain.

The younger of U-boat officers called something to our lifeboat.

"What does he want, Jennkins?" the captain asked.

"He wants to know what ship it is."

"The name's on the bow, if he's not blind."

"Yes sir; but perhaps courtesy would be in order."

The captain regarded the machine-gun in the conning-tower, and slowly removed his pipe. Then he said with grim satisfaction: "Tell them, Jennkins. Tell them her history."

Jennkins called across to the sub in a guttural gibberish. It was strange hearing the American slang-word, *Whoopee,* in the middle of it.



The sub commander talked in low tones to his lieutenant. At an order a man of the gun-crew came to life and scurried into the conning-tower Presently an object appeared, which, inflated by a small tube of compressed air, proved to be a rubber boat. The two officers and a seaman got into it, and the seaman began paddling toward the *San Salvadore.*

"The sentimental old fool!" I said. "I'd like to see a Yank destroyer climb over the horizon and catch him fiddling around with his youth!"

"That will do, Allen," said the captain

"I know how he feels," Jennkins muttered, watching the rubber boat move down the golden path made by the red sun. "He trained on her when he was a youngster and still believed in things."

By the time the German officers got aboard, there was just a red glow in the west, with the old ship silhouetted against it.

"Aint she pretty, though?" a sailor in our boat whispered. "Spanking clean and spruce as the day she was built."

"She knows," Jennkins whispered. "She's been a captive all this while, but now there's German feet on the bridge again. Did you see the sort of shiver that went through her?"

"That," I said, "is tripe."

At that moment our captain burst into a lusty and anatomical song about a girl named Gertie. We looked at him curiously; we hadn't been in the boat long enough for him to go raving mad with privation and exposure; too, he wasn't possessed of a singing voice. There was no semblance of melody; just a series of bull-like roars. The whole thing seemed entirely out of character.

"Sing, you dirty rats!" he bawled.

"I don't know the song," I yelled.

"Sing, you so-and-so! I don't know the song either! But sing something you so-and-sos!"

WE all yelled for no reason at all, making a terrible discordant din. We quit when the machine-gun gave a warning burst, kicking up spurts of water close to our boat.

I heard the sub commander yelling from the deck of the *San Salvadore.* He was waving at the sky. I saw, then, the plane above the horizon, and listening, I could hear the drone of its motor. The captain had had much sharper ears than any of the rest of us.

"Looks to me like a scouting plane from a cruiser," the captain said. "We're lucky." And he began filling his empty pipe as if everything was over.

But in reality, things had just begun. And this is the part I want to



record accurately and without romance.

It is true that a puff of wind caught at the old ship, swinging her to face the oncoming plane. It does not follow that the ship moved of its own volition, an old war-horse smelling battle.

Then the two officers aboard the *San Salvadore* left the bridge and ran to the side, to get to the sub before the plane arrived. The sub was in motion, too, gliding along the surface toward the ship to shorten the distance.

The sailor who had paddled the officers to the old windjammer had remained in the rubber boat beside the ship. As his officers appeared above him at the rail, he stood up suddenly. I shall give only the facts, which were that in standing up he found the rubber boat moving under his feet. He was overbalanced and fell suddenly, striking his head on the side of the ship. I saw this, and I am telling what happened. It is not true that a timber of the ship reached out and struck him down, as the story has grown to by now. This is not true, even though the old ship was falling apart.

She was literally coming apart; and there is nothing extremely abnormal about that. With her pumps quiet, she'd been filling; and she might have sunk anyhow even if a sub hadn't stopped us, for nothing is immortal and the old ship already had lived too many miracles. Nothing had ever been done to her in the way of repairs except in the frantic rush of wartime, and she'd been patched up and patched up until one patch overlapped another, and she'd undergone stress and strain and rot until there was no such thing as making her shipshape again. Considering what she had gone through, it's a miracle she'd stayed up as long as she did. Her time was up; that was all.

It is sheer romancing to say that the ship had, as Jennkins claimed, perked up when German feet trod her bridge again; and that she'd turned eagerly to battle, to face the cruiser that would follow the plane, to go down fighting with her honor redeemed; and that, as the Nazi officers began deserting her, repeating the disgrace she'd suffered once before, leaving her to the mercy of the enemy, her heart finally broke and she died. This is, I say, sheer romancing.

I ADMIT that she went down in a hurry. Why not? She had been filling and suddenly she no longer was buoyant.

Make a test yourself, with a half-filled glass of water floating in a tub. Put water in the glass a drop at a time. There will come a time when a single drop of water will spell the difference between floating and a sudden plunge to the bottom.

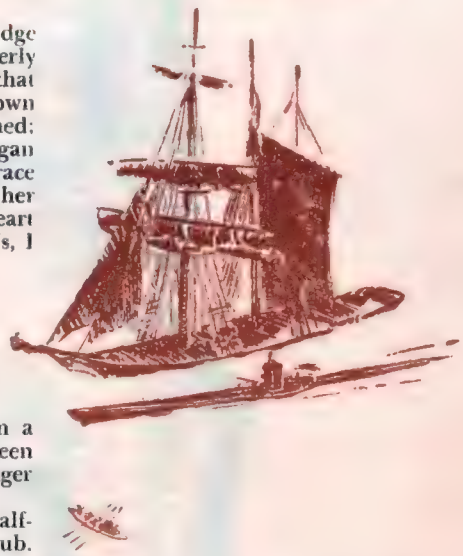
The two Nazi officers dived over the side and began swimming toward the sub, which was coming as close as it dared.

I don't remember in the confusion just what happened to the rubber boat, though of course the sailor in falling had kicked it skittering. The plane was getting bigger by the second, and making a crescendo snarl. The Germans were swimming frantically, their white hands rising out of the water with each stroke. Hands were reaching for them to help them onto the submarine's deck; then they scrambled for the conning-tower in a hurry.

"My God!" said somebody in the lifeboat.

I caught my breath.

The *San Salvadore* was keeling over. A sinking ship generally does, I would like to point out for the record. Especially a windjammer with tall top-heavy masts. She keeled over with those long masts swinging like felled trees. And the sub in its eagerness to pick up the officers had come just a bit too close. The German commander, the older officer with the strip of gray hair between ear and cap brim, was at the rim of the conning-tower as the ship went over. The Nazi looked over his shoulder and shrank back in terror, screaming, just



as the mast struck him down with a force awful enough to crumple a section of the steel conning-tower and break in two.

And then the "Unsinkable Sal" finally sank. It is irrelevant that the smashed body of the submarine's commander—caught in the rigging—went down with her.

SO these are the facts. . . . I see no need of adorning a good story with romantic claptrap about the so-called soul of a ship and about how the old windjammer couldn't sink until she had a clear conscience. I am impatient with those who imply that the ship, knowing the cruiser would follow the plane, scuttled herself rather than stand capture. And it is quite beside the point that we learned from the survivors of the submarine—whose hatch was jammed by the falling mast, so it couldn't submerge—that the Nazi commander who'd been struck dead and carried down by the ship as he tried to desert her, was a man named Von Helm.



WHEN Michael reached the dog shop after the recovery of Honey, he told the story in all detail to Mr. and Mrs. Filbert. They were greatly pleased with Pooch.

"There, now!" said Mrs. Filbert to her husband. "It's plain to be seen he's quite a dog. And it's a lesson to us not to be too ready to turn any poor creature away."

"But," protested Mr. Filbert, "I was never for turning him away. I always favored him; I thought from the very first that he was intelligent."

"Of course you did," said Mrs. Filbert. "I didn't mean you meant to be unkind. Because you never are that way with anything or anybody."

Mr. Filbert smiled and nodded.

"It was his want of breeding only," he said. "And I know you understand what I mean." He patted Pooch's head. "One can tell by the shape of his skull that he's got a good brain; also, he's got a friendly nature. A little out of place here in the shop, but he'd be a grand fellow on the farm."

Now for years Mr. Filbert's dream had been for a farm. A place with wide, fertile fields and good buildings. There'd be a long row of kennels for fine dogs; there'd be stables for beautiful horses; there would be a building and enclosures for cats of high degree; and he'd have songbirds without end. It would be a cheerful, comfortable place, and everybody there would be a person who liked and appreciated nature's graceful and friendly creatures.

But he'd never reached the place where he could buy the farm; and both Mrs. Filbert and Michael knew he never would. For he was a very

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The story of an orphan boy, a stray dog and their interesting friends in the animal store which became their home.

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

by John T. McIntyre

POOCH

good-natured man; the money he was paid for the animals and birds he sold was not much, and a good deal of it went in little ways one couldn't keep track of.

But he'd wanted the farm for so long, and thought about it so much, that at last he, little by little, began to talk about it as though it were a reality.

"I often feel," Mrs. Filbert once said to Mrs. Havey, the barber's wife, "that I should mention this to him. But then,"—with a smile,—"I suppose it's only a way he has of speaking. And besides, it's a great comfort to him when things are dull in the business. For then he sets himself to thinking about the farm, and the great lot of things he has there, and he feels very much better."

Michael, from the time he'd come to the Filberts to live, had heard of the farm. Once he had asked about it: he thought that some time they ought to go there on a visit. But when he saw Mrs. Filbert look at him and shake her head, he understood it was a thing not to be mentioned carelessly. However, when he came to know about it, and Mr. Filbert was in the humor, he'd often talk about it with him. It was a fancy that pleased Michael; there was a pleasant, comfortable something about it. Mr. Filbert was a person not without natural cheerfulness; but when he talked about the farm, he was much more cheerful than usual.

"I think it's best to have all the hunting dogs down at the west end," Mr. Filbert might say. "There are a lot of trees there, you know; they're nice as a shade in summer, and also as a windbreak when the weather's cold. The dogs will profit by that."

"Maybe it's be good to have most of the stock of the sporting kind," Michael would suggest. "You know

they're really work-dogs, and they're tough and strong. They don't catch diseases like some of the others."

Mr. Filbert agreed with this.

"I've always had that same idea," he said. "And I'd have nothing but strong water-dogs like the Chesapeake and Labrador retrievers, or gun-dogs like the pointers and setters, and some basset hounds and beagles. That pair of Afghan hounds the Dennys have are very attractive, too. They have a true sporting side, and also they have some of the qualities of a picture, which is a thing I like."

"They are very handsome and foreign-looking," said Mrs. Filbert.

"That's just what I mean," said Mr. Filbert. "One day last spring I met Eileen Clement on the street; she looked very tall and beautiful, and was nicely dressed. And she had those two Afghans with her, linked together and on a leash. They were like a pair of wonderfully trained show-dogs," said Mr. Filbert, admiring the memory of the encounter. "They had all the calm and dignity anybody'd want. And they are so well kept, and so proud, and wonderfully shaped and coated.

"People who have means, like well-bred, attractive animals," said Mr. Filbert, "and that's why I like to have so many of them on the farm. They are nice to look at and handle. And they're very profitable."

MICHAEL, as he grew from five years to fourteen, heard much of Mr. Filbert's farm. It was not far from the sea; he found that out by and by, and it was well-drained, so that the animals would not be exposed to dampness. For a time Mr. Filbert thought he'd use part of it for raising silver foxes. But he gave this up, because he couldn't bear the thought of being cruel to any animal that trusted him.

"Or who didn't, for the matter of that," he told Michael. "Silver foxes have beautiful and profitable fur," he said. "Let others take it from them if they will. But I will not. Nothing shall be done on the farm that I'll not feel is a credit to me."

Sometimes while he worked about the shop or the place outdoors, Michael thought about this farm. It was so like a thing you'd read in a story. Of course, he'd never talked about that side of it with Mr. Filbert; and there was something about Mrs. Filbert's way of looking at it that prevented his speaking to her. But he could think about it himself, and no harm done. And he did

Mr. Filbert, he thought, was the kind of person who, if he didn't have a thing, didn't worry about it. He imagined he had it, and got almost as much satisfaction out of that. If he was disappointed in anything, if he was sort of down in his spirits—well, there was the farm. If he had worked hard for a long time and felt worn out, there was the farm again.

There were lots of things in his everyday life Mr. Filbert couldn't control, but at the farm everything was just as he wanted it. It was never gloomy; the sun always shone; there were no long shadows, no times when he felt he wasn't much good and that everything was against him.

"It's almost as good as really having it," Michael thought. "He gets a good rest there; maybe better than he'd have if it *was* real."

And now the summer was getting ready to leave. It was early September and Michael, as he'd stand on the back porch, could see some spots of red or russet among the deep green. It would soon be time to begin making ready for the winter. The kennels would have to be made warmer; the birds must be protected from the wind and the snow; the rabbits and squirrels must be looked after carefully if they were to be carried through the severe season in good health.

IT had been a pleasant summer. Mr. Filbert said so, and Mrs. Filbert agreed with him. Business had been good; there had been plenty of stock and few losses. In October Mr. Filbert meant to have some repairs made; also he'd been thinking of improvements to the front of the place to make it more attractive. . . .

Pooch, since he'd come to the dog-shop, had a pleasant life. His days were jolly and free; and at night he slept soundly in an overturned barrel in the yard. After he'd had his breakfast, he'd move around the cages and look at the birds—also at the puppies, who always greeted him with loud barks and a playful jumping about.

He'd then have a visit with Chug, who slept on a high perch under the roof of the back porch; after that he'd sit outside the shop and watch the traffic of the street. Later, he'd trot along down Main Street, stopping here and there to greet dogs whom he knew, also being genial and pleasant with people who spoke to him.

Pooch knew almost everyone by now; and there wasn't a house on Main Street, or any of the streets branching off from it, he wasn't acquainted with. Anything new or unusual got his immediate attention. Some distance up the street where the Clements lived there was a very nice house standing back from the walk. It had a carefully kept lawn and fine shade-trees. But no one lived there, a thing which Pooch often seemed to wonder about as he sat on the sidewalk and looked at it.



"Pooch turned the bend on

He knew several ways of getting into the back yard, and had done a good deal of digging there, but with no results. There had evidently been no dogs kept at the place for a long time. But on one of these early September mornings as he paused in front of the house, probably to make up his mind if it were worth while visiting the yard again, he saw a little girl on the lawn; and there was a very black and very short-legged Scotch terrier chasing a ball. Along with this, Pooch saw the windows were all open, and with white curtains; there was a car standing in the drive; also there were the sounds of voices.

Pleased to see all this, Pooch barked a salutation. At once the Scotty dropped the ball and came down the walk; he bristled; he was very gruff.

But Pooch was quite a smoothie in spots like this. He'd been in many of them, and had worked out a way of handling them. He lolled his tongue in laughing good-fellowship; he wagged his tail, and showed in every way that he was quite ready to get on very good terms at once.

But Scotties, where strangers are concerned, are a frowning family. Also this one had a child to take care of. His bark warned Pooch away. Not only that: it told him quite plainly not to come back. But Pooch was a pup who'd known hard knocks and cold receptions; and he'd learned that one must take a stand against them. So he kept his tail moving; he hopped around playfully to show there was no occasion at all for hard feelings.

But the Scotty did not like the stranger's actions; especially as they brought him nearer to the little girl. So without further ado he flew at Pooch with bared teeth, and rolled him over. Pooch yelped, the high outcry of a pup in trouble; and the Scotty stood over him threateningly.

At once people appeared on the lawn. The little girl was snatched up and enfolded in sheltering arms. A man's voice called to the terrier:

"Angus! Stop that!"

And oddly enough, Pooch heard his own name being called. So he got up, shook himself and looked around. It was Eileen, and he bounded to her joyfully, his troubles forgotten.

"Pooch!" said Eileen. "Where in the world did you come from?" She turned to the girl who held the child. "Oh, no," she said, "he'd never harm the baby. He's the little dog I was telling you about; the one who told the boy that Honey was in the drain."

"Oh, my goodness!" said the other girl. "Angus, how could you! Such a good little thing, and to treat him that way!"

However, Pooch was not put out in any way. And Augus, now seeing no harm had been meant, became very companionable. He and Pooch patched matters up instantly; and Pooch took him around into the back yard to show him his digging operations of some time before.

Pooch went back home with Eileen in her car. And while he was being fed in the kitchen, Eileen saw the mail-carrier had left a letter for her. From Honolulu—from Tom Denny!

IX

A FEW days after this, Michael had an errand that took him to the next town. Some people there had bought a pair of young chows—litter brothers, and fine dogs. But it was discovered that they wouldn't ride in the shop's car, and the result was that they were taken by railroad.

As there would be no train back for some hours, Michael set out on the seven-mile journey afoot. About a mile on the way he got a lift, from Eileen Clement. And it was then he heard the news from Tom.

"I know he wanted to say more," said Eileen. "But they are not permitted to. He said he was well. He's been made a second lieutenant, and he likes everything very much."

"Nothing at all about when the war might start?"

"Not a word."

Michael nodded.

"Of course that's the right way to do," he said. "But I only wish I was in that ship with him out there in the Pacific."

"It would be dangerous," said Eileen, and Michael noticed a little shake in her voice.

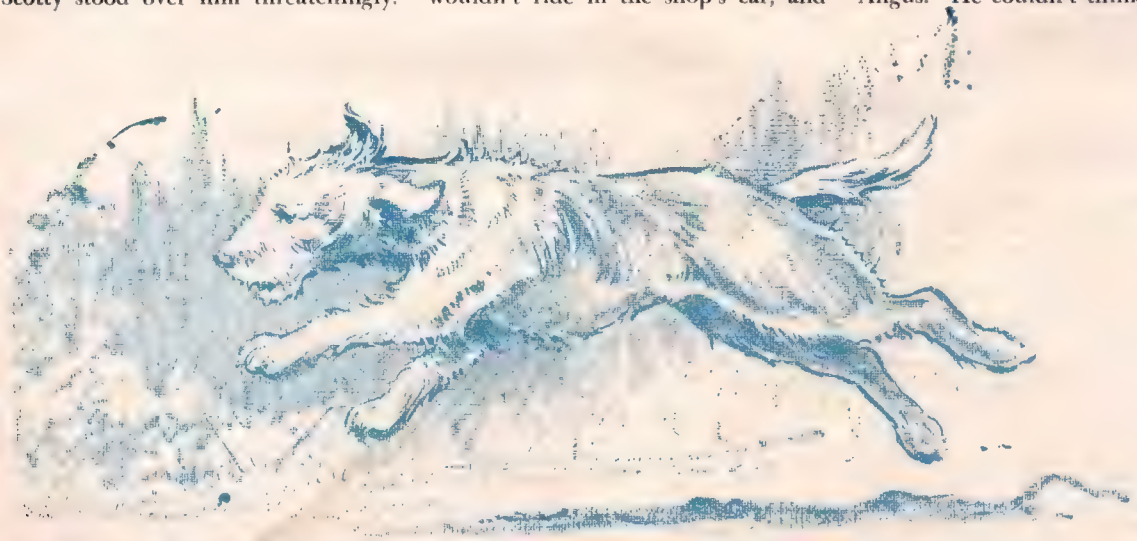
"Tom'll be all right," he assured her. "When the shooting's over, he'll be back to tell us all about it."

The people who'd taken the house where Pooch had the encounter with the Scotty were friends of Eileen's. Their name was Fulton. Mrs. Fulton had been a classmate of Eileen's at college, and her husband was a doctor.

"He's retired from practice to work out some ideas he has about nerves," Eileen told Michael. "Having a good deal of money, he can do that."

Pooch in his visiting around had got in the habit of taking in the Clements' and the Dennys' in the same journey. He'd stop at Clements' for a word; then he'd trot along, turn into the north road where it crossed about a half-mile away, and went straight on to the Dennys'.

But now things had changed a little. Before he got to the turn, there were the Fultons. Also his new friend Angus. He couldn't think of passing



one ear. And was he saying things!"

without pausing for at least a moment. And it often happened that he'd not only see Angus but the other members of the family as well. Pooch amused Mrs. Fulton; she'd always laugh when she saw him, and he'd hang out his tongue and grin happily.

"I think," she told her husband, "he's the funniest pup I've ever seen. That black eye he has is amazing!"

"Maybe Angus gave him that in the fight they had," suggested the Doctor. But his interest in Pooch was usually different from that of Mrs. Fulton. It was serious. He was learned in the matter of dogs, and he saw a number of strains in the pup. "There's terrier," he said. "And there's hound, and very likely other blood. But they all go to make a solid mongrel base."

"But he's so intelligent," said Mrs. Fulton. "And I'd thought mongrels were stupid."

"Not all of them," said the Doctor, "—though it's sometimes believed they are. It is possible to destroy vitality, intelligence and other valuable things by mixing breeds; but you can do the same thing by too close breeding. Among humans, dying families, even races, have been given new life by intermarriage with stranger people. You'll see mongrels that are worthless; but then again you'll see highly-bred, handsome dogs that have nothing but that. We all have an interest and an admiration for well-managed dogs. But both our interest and admiration increases when we come upon a casual like this who, as the saying is, does everything except talk."

Pooch was fond of the Fultons. He was especially fond of the little girl. He'd leap and bark when her nurse brought her out, and the child would laugh and call out his name.

"I really think she likes him better than she does Angus," the nurse said to Mrs. Fulton.

"She doesn't, really," said Mrs. Fulton. "But he makes her laugh. And Angus is such an old sobersides."

"Of course," said the nurse, "Angus would be safer and more of a protection if anything should happen."

NOW a day came, and not long after this, when Pooch, having left the Clements', was trotting along in his usual free way, toward the Fultons'.

Pooch wasn't the sort of pup that worried. He took things as they came; if he found them not worth his while, he forgot them. His system seemed to be: why carry around a lot of stuff you can't use?

As he went along, he looked good-humoredly at a small bird perched on a fence who chirped at him saucily. He looked at the light-blue sky with the great white clouds moving across it. He stopped for a while to watch some boys playing in a field. There was a dog barking somewhere, and he answered it a few times. He found some rabbit tracks by the roadside, and sniffed at them; but he had no time to follow them.

There were not many houses in this part of the road; indeed, after passing the Clements' you were almost in the country. And Pooch had always liked it along here; as a change from Main Street it was first-rate. He paused for a moment at a lane that crossed the road. Some distance along, to the right, he saw a small truck. And—yes, that was Jimmy Henry getting into it; and that man in the seat was the man he so often saw with him.

Pooch wagged his tail; Jimmy was a particular friend of his, and was always up to some little trick or another. And Pooch liked that. He was wondering if he'd better go down the lane and let the boy know he was around, or if he'd better keep on as he was and— But just then there was a rush and a rattle, and Pooch, frightened, jumped to one side. It was a car, and it had almost struck him: a very shabby-looking old car with two men in it. Pooch didn't know them. He picked himself up out of the dust and gave himself a good shaking. Then he looked after the car once more.

It was wabbling on its old wheels, and patched tires; it had a rusty and neglected look. But it was stopping at the Fultons'.

Pooch hurried along the road to see what was going on. One of the men got out. He went through an opening in the fence that Pooch knew about. Somehow, this didn't seem right to the pup. For a dog to go through a broken place in a fence was to be expected; but it was not the thing for a person to do.

Pooch lost sight of the man for a moment or two; the trees hid him. The pup jogged along the road toward the house, his nose held high to catch any scent that might be coming from that direction. And then suddenly he saw the man again! He was running, and he had the baby in his arms!

From that moment it wouldn't be possible to try and guess what Pooch did, or what was in his six-months-old mind. However, now that we've looked at those two words *"six months,"* we'll take them back. The thing that answered in Pooch at the moment he saw the strange man with the Fultons' baby in his arms, was much older than six months: it was older than six years, or six hundred years. If you said six thousand years, you likely would still be short of it.

It was a thing that went back to that far time when the dog first came out of the wilds and became the friend of man. When he lived with him in a cave, or a hole in a hillside; in a tent made of skins, or a sod house, or one made of bark and poles. When he went with him and helped him in his battles with the great beasts of the wilderness. When he ate of the food belonging to the man, when he guarded his belongings, when he was the friend and protector of his children. Pooch was only a stray mongrel pup, and had no thought of any of these things; he didn't know of the vast memories that were in his blood and bones and sinews, and very deep in his nature. And now when they all flamed up, overwhelming him at this moment, we'd better not try to follow them. The best thing to do is to go to Jimmy Henry and listen to what he'd have to say.

"WE'D been doing a job on a pump at Jones'," said Jimmy, "my father and me. We'd finished with it, and we'd put the tools in the truck and were about starting, when I saw Pooch standing in the road just where the lane crossed it. When we got into the road, he'd moved along some toward the Fultons'; and then, all of a sudden, he almost jumped out of his skin and began to yell and run.

"My father says to me: 'What's the matter with him?' And I said I didn't know, but that something had struck him pretty hard and pretty quick.

"Then I saw the man. He was going toward the car, and he had a little child in his arms. There was another man; he opened the car door, and the one with the child was about to get in when Pooch grabbed him by the leg. The man kicked him into the ditch alongside the road—and then they were off.

"My father says to me: 'There's something funny about this. Who is that man? And what did that pup get so excited about, and what did he grab him by the leg for?'

"He was awful slow on the uptake," said Jimmy Henry. "But I'm not letting myself out of it. I was worse than he was."

" 'That fool kioodle!' I says. 'He'll get himself hurt. There he is up on his feet again, and tearing after them.'

"The car," said Jimmy, "had got around the bend. And when it did, Pooch couldn't see it and he started to yip again. He's only a mutt," said Jimmy, "but honest, as I listened to him, he sounded like a hound. You know, like as if it was some one ringing a bell. And do you know that sound wakened my dad up. He gave our old sloop the gas, and we went a-skipping along the road. But I'm still sound asleep.

" 'What's all the hurry for?' I says.

" 'There's something wrong. Those two men—they were at Dr. Fulton's

place. Didn't you see that the one who got into the car had a child with him?'

"And then," said Jimmy, "I came to. When I looked, Pooch was turning the bend, and he looked like he was doing it on one ear. And was he saying things! I never heard a small dog make so many sounds!

"Our truck can't get up much speed," said Jimmy. "Dad said the best we could hope for was to meet a car that could go, tell the people in it what had happened, and then they could take over. I was saying if we couldn't catch that old 1892 model we were after, we ought to trade the truck for a wheelbarrow. And while I was saying it, we heard a crash. And as we rounded the curve, we saw the other car had hit something. It was standing sideways across the road; the two men were out of it, with the little girl, and were running across the fields.

"So we stopped and took to the fields too," said Jimmy Henry. "The two men had a good start on us, but we kept after them. Dad aint much at running any more, so I moved ahead of him. The men having the child weren't doing so well, either; they turned into a stretch of land where there were a lot of pine trees and thick brush. In this I had to slow down and begin to hunt.

"Sometimes I could hear them; they seemed to have lost their way and had turned back toward the road. And when I couldn't hear them any more, I got up into a tree to take a look around. I couldn't see *them*, but this is what I did see: Pooch was tearing along the road. For a couple of seconds I thought he'd got lost too. But then I saw that right there was the Denny place. And about a dozen yards away was the fence around the kennels.

"All the time the pup had never stopped yelping. And while I was looking, I saw those two big Afghan hounds on the other side of the fence. They heard Pooch and were all excited, and running around. What the pup had been doing for the last little while was yelping like a mutt; but now I think he smelled the Afghans, and right away he turned hound again.

"His voice changed. The bell in it sounded again, only louder than before. He'd stopped at the kennel fence, stood up on his hindlegs and sounded that hunting cry. I could still see the Afghans, and now they were wild. Suddenly one of them jumped at the fence, but he couldn't make it. It was too high. Then they both began to sound off. Between them and Pooch, they had every dog for a mile in all directions yelling his head off. Then the Afghan tried the fence again. This time he made it. And it looked like no sooner did he hit the ground than the other one was beside him.

"Now, I don't want to sound as though I was building this up," said Jimmy Henry, "but whatever it was in that belling of Pooch, it told those two big dogs that something was to be hunted. And they started right away—in among the trees and brush. I could hear them thrashing around hunting for the trail, and never letting up on the noise for a second.

"Then I heard my father, who was now out on the road, shout:

"'There are those men, right ahead!'

"So they were. I could see them. And as true as I stand here, that pup Pooch was right at the heels of the one that had the little girl. The man kicked at him, but missed. And then the Afghans broke out of the bush, and were at them. The man dropped the baby in the road and tried to get away, but the two big boys pulled him down.

"I came down that tree quicker than anything I'd ever done in my life," said Jimmy. "I must have fell down. I got out in the road to the place where the baby was. And that Pooch was right beside her. And you ought to see the way he looked when he seen me coming near her. Forty wild wolves couldn't have been more savage! But when he knew it was me, he just lay down in the dust and started to whimper. Showing, after it was all over, he wasn't anything else but just a pup."



The Afghans broke out of the bush. The man tried to get away, but the two big boys pulled him down.

X

THE two Afghans held the kidnaper until he was taken in charge; the other man managed to escape, but was caught next day in a town some distance away.

And when Jimmy Henry told about Pooch, the pup became a hero. He was pointed out on the street; children gathered around and petted him. He was talked about everywhere.



"It's the kind of thing I've often said," the Doctor told the dog-shop man. "If you want a steady, dependable thing, you get it from careful breeding; but that is not the system that produces the unusual. If you want genius, you must get it in a freer way. It usually springs up in unexpected places. In anything in which Nature is unrestricted, she, in the long run, and not too often, produces remarkable results."

MRS. FULTON gave Pooch a collar; and he wore it with some astonishment. Michael noticed this, and spoke to him, seriously.

"Listen, fellah," Michael said, "don't let all this go to your head. Don't get to be a spoiled dog. Do you see what I mean? You've done pretty well. But it'll not do to start thinking you're right up on the top. You're only a pup, and you've got a lot to learn. Keep that in mind."

Pooch was pleased with this advice. At any rate, he wagged his tail and followed Michael as he went about his work. "He has a nice disposition," said Mr. Filbert. "And as he'll never be pampered by anybody, he'll not lose it."

Michael was building a crate out of strips of wood, a sort of crate which was to hold two collie pups that were to be shipped away that morning.

"Pooch'll do all right," he said. "Because the kind of people who'd want to overfeed him and make a fathead of him, are the kind that wouldn't own a dog like him. Now here are two pups that maybe'll have a bad time of it." And he pointed to the collies that were in a large cage at one side. "I asked about the house they're going to. It's in the city where there'll have to be someone to take them out for walks. Always on a leash! They'll not have any place to run in. There'll not be any place to go swimming. There won't be any kids to play with."

"Too bad," said Mr. Filbert, and shook his head.

"Of course," said Michael, "the shop's a place were dogs are sold. And it's nice to make the sale. But I do wish when people buy dogs that'll have to live in a house, they'd buy small ones. Maybe toy dogs—and short-haired dogs—that get along pretty well indoors. But when they buy a collie, or a pointer, an Airedale or a dog like that, and then bring him up in a house, that's too bad."

It was on this same day that Mrs. Garnet came into the shop to speak to Mr. Filbert about D'Artagnan. She lived in a large house situated at a lonely place on the north beach. Her husband had been a cattle-dealer in Iowa, but had been forced to give up his business because of illness. They'd come East and had taken the house by the sea because of the sea air.

"We have a dog," said Mrs. Garnet, "which was used by my husband in herding cattle. I don't know his breed, but he is strong and courageous and was very valuable in the business. We thought to keep him, but found it wouldn't be possible. He is not an animal to have about the house; the children are afraid of him, and people along the shore think him dangerous."

She said a dog of this kind might be of use to some one, and that her husband was willing to sell it at a reasonable price. After she had gone, Mr. Filbert shook his head dubiously; large, fierce, hard-to-manage dogs were not in his line.

"We might be able to sell him and not have to handle him much," said Michael. "I remember Mr. Osgood, from up at Double Shoal, was up some time ago looking for a watchdog, and this was just the kind he talked about."

"Well, you might call him up," said Mr. Filbert. "Of course, it don't do to turn business away."

Mr. Osgood owned a fine place at the Shoal, and he had a watchman, but during the past season damage was done his property and things had been stolen.

"My watchman isn't very alert," he'd said on his visit to the dog-shop. "But he's a sort of pensioner of mine, and I don't want to turn him away. A good, wide-awake dog might make a difference."

So Michael called Mr. Osgood, who was at once interested.

"Suppose," he said, "you bring him up to the Shoal and let me look at him. From what you say, he's very promising."

So next day Michael got out the car and drove to Garnets' on the north beach. Leaving the car at the roadside, the boy walked up the winding graveled way to the house. And almost at once he saw the dog. It was big and strong-looking; its head resembled that of a Boxer, but the body was long, slim at the quarters, and with a depth of chest like an Irish wolfhound.

Michael whistled under his breath as he took in the animal's fearless, aggressive bearing.

"D'Artagnan himself!" he said.

There was a man sitting in an invalid's chair on the porch, wrapped in a rug. Michael called to him.

"Mr. Garnet?"

"Yes," said the man. "But look out for the dog."

Michael, however, knowing dogs as he did, never paused in his stride. The dog advanced to meet him, grumbling down in his chest, his amber-colored eyes carrying a threat.

"How are you, old topper?" said Michael. "How's Porthos and all the rest of the fellahs?"

He passed on. The dog stopped, then followed close behind him, sniffing at his tracks. Michael told Mr. Garnet he was from the dog-shop, and that they had a possible buyer.

"I think he'll be hard to sell," said Mr. Garnet. "He's a grand animal, but he's not friendly. He was trained that way. I never saw a better work-dog; he can bunch a lot of cattle together and get them moving quicker than any other one I've ever seen.

"I'm very fond of him; but you see he was brought up in the fields and the stables, and he doesn't know how to conduct himself around the house. He makes Mrs. Garnet nervous, and he looks so fierce the children run whenever they see him."

"HAS he ever hurt anyone?" asked Michael.

"Never. But when a stranger comes along, he has a way about him that isn't very promising."

Michael looked at the dog; he was a grand, strong-looking beast, but as Mr. Garnet suggested, never meant



Pooch settled beside the rod and bag. He grumbled a little to himself.

by nature to be a pet or the playfellow of children.

"He ought to make a watchdog," said Michael.

"He's intelligent," said Mr. Garnet, "and when he got the idea of what he was to do, and had some one to control him, he'd be first rate."

The result was that Michael took the big dog away in the car; and as they drove along, the boy studied him. The amber-colored eyes glowed, the big square head was firmly set on the powerful neck; the great body seemed a dynamo of power.

"Just sitting beside him," thought Michael, "makes me feel like he was a storm tied up in a bundle. The right place for a dog like this is in the Army."

DOUBLE SHOAL was more than an hour's drive away; to get there, Michael had to cross and recross the bay. Fortunately Mr. Osgood was at home. He summoned the watchman, who lived in a cabin along the dunes, and they looked at the dog for a while without speaking.

"What's his name?" asked Mr. Osgood finally.

Now Michael had neglected to speak of this to Mr. Garnet; but he didn't hesitate.

"D'Artagnan," he said.

Mr. Osgood laughed.

"A very good name for him," he said. "From his looks, he has the makings of a hero."

But the watchman, who was quite an old man, and walked with the help of a stick, didn't approve of the dog.

"I'd be afeerd of him," he said. "He looks savage. Sometime he might turn on me."

The members of the household were called to pass judgment on D'Artagnan; and it was soon shown that they agreed with the watchman.

"He's a strong, handsome fellow," said Mrs. Osgood, "but he's no dog to have around a place like this. He'd have to be chained up; I don't think I could stand seeing him that way."

"I'd like to sell him," said Michael, "because Mr. Garnet's sick, and I think he needs the money. But I do think he's too much dog for a place like this."

"You can see," said Mrs. Osgood, "that he's full of spirit and enterprise. I think," she said to her husband, "he would be in exactly his place if he were with the Army. I hear they are training a lot of dogs for the Army now."

"That's an idea!" said Mr. Osgood. Michael then told him how the dog had been reared and trained among cattlemen. Mr. Osgood nodded understandingly. "A pretty thorough-going lot of men," he said. "And a dog accustomed to them would feel at home with the troops."

"I think," said Michael, "if ever there was a soldier-dog, D'Artagnan is the fellah. But I don't think Mr. Garnet could afford to give him away."

Now Mr. Osgood was well to do, and quite patriotic.

"I think we could arrange that," he said to his wife.

"I've heard the Garnets are pinched for money," she said. "Send them a check for the dog. And then we can get him settled."

Michael was elated at this.

"If you want us to," he said to Mr. Osgood, "the shop'll handle the thing without a commission. I'll take D'Artagnan along with me and have him enlisted tomorrow. And we'll have the papers sent to you as his owner."

"Very good," said Mr. Osgood. "That will be just the thing."

When Michael arrived at the dog-shop with D'Artagnan, he told Mr. Filbert what had happened.

"He's a splendid dog," said Mr. Filbert, after he'd patted the animal and given it a crockery bowl of cool water. Mr. Filbert had found that nothing put him on better terms with a new dog than this. "A mixture of breeds, a mongrel," said Mr. Filbert, "but still a remarkable beast. And the Army is just the place for him. You can take him over to Sothron's Point tomorrow. I know they'll be glad to get him."

D'Artagnan was fed and given the run of the side yard. Pooch showed marked interest in the newcomer, and at once struck up a friendship. As the big dog moved about the yard, the pup swaggered at his side in a way that made Michael chuckle.

"Comrades-in-arms!" he said to Mrs. Filbert. "And if the pooch had more weight and wasn't so friendly with everybody, he might be all right for a soldier too."

NEXT morning, Michael ran over to Sothron's Point with D'Artagnan. There was a sergeant in charge of the station, and he at once showed interest in the big recruit.

"No family, but plenty of power," he remarked. "So you're thinking of putting him into the service, eh?"

"He belongs to Mr. Osgood, of Double Shoals," said Michael. "And he'd like to see him entered."

"You can leave him," said the sergeant; "we'll write to Mr. Osgood a little later."

"Do you think he'll get in?" asked Michael.

The sergeant laughed.

"I wish I was as sure of everything as I am of that," he said. "He's the

kind of dog this branch of the service dreams of."

"That's fine," said Michael. He patted the powerful neck of the big recruit. "Good-by, fellah," he said. "Hold your chin up, and keep paying attention."

He sat in the car until he saw D'Artagnan led away to the kennels by an admiring handler; then he headed away for home.

About the middle of the morning Michael said to Mr. Filbert:

"There's not going to be much today, and I'd like the afternoon off."

"Yes, take a little run around," said Mr. Filbert readily. "You've not had one for some time. It'll do you good."

"Also," said the boy, "I want to get Pooch away some place where he'll have a chance to forget about being a hero. Jimmy Henry's going to do a job at that fisherman's hotel down on the island near the bridge. We can ride there and back with him. That'll give us three or four hours on the beach."

"Very nice," approved Mr. Filbert. "And take some little things with you to eat."

Michael telephoned Henry's shop, and Jimmy was pleased.

"I don't mind the job," he said. "All I got to do is fit the pipe; their own people'll do everything else. But the run down there and back is not so good. So it'll be nice to have you along."

Michael took a surf-rod and bait; also a pair of field glasses, which he packed in the bag with the lunch. And he had a small and very good camera he'd saved money to buy.

As the small truck crossed the bridge to the island, there was a swirling darkness in the sky on ahead.

"Swallows," said Michael. "They've started to gather early this year." The great flock of birds was like a storm-cloud; they were so thickly massed in the air that not a ray of light was to be seen anywhere among them.

"I'm always glad to see them," said Jimmy, "but at the same time, I'm sorry, because they always tell me the summer's about over."

"I wouldn't be surprised if the winter gulls aren't beginning to be seen on the beach," said Michael.

"And the ducks will be coming down from the North, too."

"I wish we were nearer that flock of swallows," said Michael. "I'd like to get a snap at them. They'd make a nice picture. I might not see another lot like that."

At the end of the bridge Michael left the truck with his belongings, and Pooch followed him, quite delighted with the prospect for the day.

"I'll be here sometime toward six o'clock," said Jimmy. "If you're not here, I'll wait. If I'm not, then you wait."

When the truck had gone, Michael picked up his rod, still in its case; also the camera and the canvas bag, and with Pooch running on ahead, he made his way down to the beach. They'd soon left the houses of the summer people behind them; ahead was a deep sandy shore with the green waves tumbling in and breaking into white foam.

Yes, some of the big winter gulls were already there; and the tern, while still to be seen, were not nearly so many as in the summer. A handsome fish-hawk flapped his wings above the outer surf, watching for fish that might come in to feed. Michael, as they went along, kept his eyes on this keen-visioned hunter; now and then it would begin a dive, but would level off again when it saw the chance for a strike was past. A few times it plunged and struck, but missed, rising with empty claws. But finally it drove head-down for a space, then righted and hooked its talons into a large bluefish, rising triumphantly with it, and winging off in the direction of some small islands in the bay.

Pooch, who always showed an interest in whatever Michael was watching, witnessed this performance with much surprise. It was a new thing to him; he *woof-woofed* in an undertone, and looked at the boy as though to say:

"Well, what do you think of that?"



IT was a grand, blowy day; there was no haze to be seen, even in the low meadows; the sky was high and clear. There had been a storm a few days before; the beach was swept clean, and it was completely free of the prints of human feet. But Pooch found other tracks, and sniffed at them with interest.

"Those you're working on now, fellah," said Michael, "were made by gulls. They look something like fold-up fans that have been opened. This track here—do you see it? A little one, aint it? Well, that's been left by a sandpiper. And that long one over there by the foot of the dune was made by a kind of a sand snake. There are lots of folk around, old-timer, but they don't let you get too close to them."

Little bands of sandpipers were busily engaged in racing after retreating waves and frantically picking with their long bills in the wet sand; then, as the next wave came tumbling in, they'd run swiftly ahead of it up the sandy incline. These little strategists knew when to run and when to stop. The instant a wave had spent itself, they'd halt; and as it went streaming back, they'd hurry after it; and the performance of a few moments before would be repeated.

In the lowland, running through the middle of the island, were the dense growths of bayberry bush; the hardy, sparse, long-stemmed grass was

thick upon the dunes and in the sun-drenched glades about them; plants were still flowering sturdily: beach pea, the sandwort and poverty grass were everywhere.

Michael unslung his camera; then he put down his bag and rod in the shadow of a dune, bidding Pooch sit beside him and watch them. This the pup did, rather surprised and not quite understanding. As has been shown, he was quite ready to act as a guard; but this was the first time he'd been, definitely, by command, given responsibility.

However, he sat down with no protest, and wistfully watched Michael as he moved away. When the boy had disappeared behind the dunes, the pup looked out to sea. It was a vast place, to be sure; all water and moving ceaselessly; and the sky, which had always seemed very high, came down to meet it far out at the place where you could see no farther.

Tern, and sometimes the great winter gulls, flew overhead; smaller birds in flocks of a dozen or more skimmed swiftly along over the water. A group of possibly two dozen gulls had settled a little above the surf-line; they stood motionless, and voiceless.

That they made no sound and never stirred, interested Pooch. He looked at them for some time. Now he, if he hadn't things to watch, would have moved around quite a good deal. He had glimpses of the beach that promised interesting sights and smells; and he felt sure the other side of the dunes would afford equally good entertainment. There were many things to be barked at; others that it would be fun to chase.

He understood these things. But standing still and saying nothing, as the gulls were doing, he didn't understand. There was something queer about it.

Now and then the waiting pup had a view of Michael in the distance. He'd wag his tail. The boy was coming back: something was going to start. But the upheld ears drooped and there were small whimpers. Michael had disappeared again. However, almost at once the pup cheered up. There was a flight of butterflies; away in the distance was a ship with smoke lifting from it; a long line of swallows perched on a telegraph wire. The place was a very nice one. But when you had stuff to watch and had to sit beside it—the ears beginning to droop again—you got kind of tired.

Michael knew Pooch wasn't having a very good time, and wanted to get back to him. But when he'd taken out his camera awhile before, he'd seen a large butterfly with splendid, color-splashed wings. He'd been following it, hoping to get a picture. Now and then it would alight, but



sometimes in a position that had no value; at others it hadn't been in position long enough to focus it. But he kept up the chase, hoping he'd finally have some luck.

Pooch was still on watch. When the wind lulled, there were black flies that came out of the protection of the grass and annoyed him; he snapped at them, but couldn't drive them away. In the shadow of the dunes he saw a small toad, just the color of the sand; it hopped along in a comic way, and the pup was amused. He approached and gave it a little pat with a paw. But it drew itself together, and was still. Pooch was discouraged. He looked around, bored. He felt he'd rather be at home. This was a place where he *could* have fun, but he wasn't having it.

But now he saw something else. Just by chance! In the sand near the dune was a small hollow place, and a sort of wall was built around it. It was about the size of a bowl. And over the top of the built-up sand he saw a pair of eyes looking at him.

POOCH looked at these attentively. They were odd eyes; he'd never seen any like them before. There seemed to be two rods sticking up over the wall of sand, and the eyes were in the ends of these rods. Small eyes. Peering, slow, and not bright.

Pooch stirred uneasily. This was a very strange thing, indeed. His impulse was to arise and go for a nearer look. But no, that wouldn't do. He had to keep where he was: there were Michael's belongings lying there. If he moved away, what would happen to them? So he did no more than sit up and watch the eyes that were peering at him from the hollow in the sand.

After some time there was a movement behind the sand wall. A crab gradually came into view, a beach crab, a sea creature which maybe left the sea ages ago and had since lived in holes burrowed in the sand. A cautious, watchful, dim-visioned thing, as pale as the sand itself, and unless it was in motion, hard to see.

Pooch grew more uneasy. This was a strange creature; it had many legs and large claws. He didn't like the look of it. And now that it had moved across the wall enclosing the doorway of its burrow, it was motionless once more. It stared at Pooch as though studying him carefully. The pup stretched out his neck and sniffed in the crab's direction. But this told him nothing. He looked down the beach for Michael, but the boy was not in view. The crab continued to stare for some time: and then, to the alarm of Pooch, it began to move toward him.

He liked the whole thing less and less. For the creature to sit at a distance and stare was one thing: not a pleasant thing, of course, but it could do it if it wanted to. But this business of moving toward Michael's things was something else. It was firmly fixed in Pooch's pup mind that he was there to watch those things, and so, as the beach crab kept moving forward, he growled. . . .

Hello! The thing had stopped. It was staring again. And now the pup made up his mind that he wasn't going to put up with that, either. So he barked. Instantly, almost in a flash, the crab was behind the walls of its burrow entrance. Pooch barked again, and the armored fright vanished from view.

The pup got up and walked about. He was pleased. He'd found a way of dealing with intruders. So let them take care from that time on.

He settled down again beside the rod and bag. And he looked at the gulls, still voiceless, still motionless. He grumbled a little to himself. After all, what were they up to, standing there like that? Sometimes they'd look at *him*. He'd noticed that. How did he know but maybe they too would soon begin moving toward the things he was taking care of?

Michael, after a patient pursuit, had finally caught the butterfly, with its wings grandly spread, poised upon the edge of a flower. He'd snapped it several times to make quite sure; and then, well satisfied, he started back toward the place where he'd left Pooch. He appeared, perhaps a little suddenly, in an opening between two dunes; the group of gulls which Pooch was regarding so suspiciously, noted this sudden appearance, and there was an instant commotion among them. Pooch, whose back was turned, did not see Michael, and taking the sudden movement among the birds to be a hostile act, began to

bark furiously, and rushed at them, scattering them into the air in all directions.

Michael, surprised, saw this, and called to the pup, whose warlike manner at once turned to one of gladness. He bounded about delightedly, and leaped up at Michael as he approached.

But Michael was quite severe. He shook a finger, and said:

"What's this, fellah? Chasing birds! Don't you see birds every day? Aint they nice little people, and don't they whistle fine and fill the old shop with music? And aint they your friends?"

Pooch was bothered. He barked in protest. He was watching the property! He stood up on his hindlegs and pawed at Michael.

"I didn't think you'd do that, ever," said Michael. "I thought you had some education."

Pooch sat down, his ears drooping. Indeed, his whole manner was one of discouragement. And Michael studied him. Through the whole summer he hadn't seen Pooch do a thing that could be called wrong. He didn't chew things. He'd been quiet of nights; he didn't need someone after him all the time to see that he was conducting himself properly. The boy couldn't quite understand this sudden outbreak. And against birds! Why, all along, he'd been great chums with them. Michael turned and was about to put down his camera alongside the other things. But no, that wouldn't do. Never put a camera down in the sand! He remembered that one. So he put it in the bag. And while he was doing this, Pooch approached. The pup lolled out his tongue, and took on a more cheerful look. Michael could now see what good care he'd taken of his things, how well he'd guarded them. And then the boy understood.

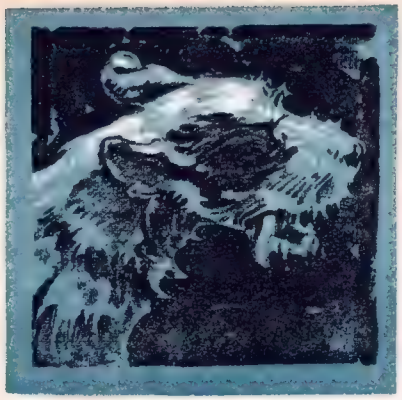
Of course! Pooch had been sitting there all this time, acting as watch-dog as he'd been told to do. His rush at the gulls had been police work. He was merely keeping them at a distance.

"Well, old scout," Michael said, "all is forgiven! I didn't think you'd take your job as seriously as that." He handled the bag and rod-case to show that these things were under discussion. He patted the pup's head and shook his paw. And Pooch, greatly delighted, yelped and skipped around. His work had been appreciated, and everything was now all right!

The surf was just right for a swim, and Michael got ready.

"I don't know about you, pup," he said to Pooch, looking at him doubtfully. "You're kind of small for these rollers. Maybe you'd best stay out."

He slipped into the water himself, and with a plunge and a stroke or two



was beyond the breakers. He turned to wave a hand to Pooch, but the pup was not visible. Then he heard a small splashing and a breathing almost beside him. And there was Pooch, his nose well above the water and his eyes twinkling with enjoyment.

"There you are, eh?" said Michael, admiringly. "I said right at first you had a lot of some kind of terrier in you. And then you showed me you had a good bit of hound. And now what do I find but that your grandfather or somebody must have been a pretty good water-dog. Put them all together, fellah, and they add up to a mutt. But what a mutt! You don't know what rubies or things like that are, so I don't mind saying I wouldn't trade you for a sackful of them."

XI

SEPTEMBER went by, full of sun and with those long afternoons that tell of summer's reluctance to leave. October came in briskly, with fresh mornings and cool evenings. Often it rained. But it was a fine time of year.

"What I like about October," said Michael to Mr. Filbert, "is that you feel so good in it. Work don't seem to be any trouble. Everything goes right along."

"It's a very healthy season," agreed Mr. Filbert. "I like it myself. And I notice it on the farm more than any other place. Everything is brown and cheerful; the animals, the trees, the hardy plants are all getting ready for the coming of winter."

With each fall, Michael had wished for a larger space for the squirrels. These active little fellows, always on the go, never seemed to him to have enough room. The cages, in which they whirled around, had never seemed right. So now he'd got Mr. Filbert's consent and was building an enclosure to be covered with wire netting.

There had lately been an old locust tree cut down on Chapmans' lot.

"I'd like to have about fifteen feet or so of the trunk," Michael said to Mr. Chapman. "It'd make a nice place for our squirrels."

Mr. Chapman said he could have the tree to do what he liked with it. So Michael got a two-handled cross-cut saw, and one late afternoon when all their other work had been done, he and Jimmy Henry cut the top off the old locust as it lay upon the ground; then they put a chain around the trunk, attached it to Henry's truck and dragged it to the far side of the dog-shop yard. A few days later they dug a hole about five feet deep, slid the thick end of the tree trunk into it, then straightened it up and filled in the hole around its base. The top of the cut-off tree trunk was now about a dozen feet above the ground.

"You know," said Jimmy, as they stood off at a little distance to look at it, "with all these holes in it and those passageways, it'll be like a squirrel's apartment house."

When Michael had covered everything with a wire framework having a door fitted into it, he moved the squirrels in, and was gratified by the cheerful way they took possession.

"You were right, Michael," said Mrs. Filbert; "the little things needed more room, and this will be a more natural way for them to live."

Chug, the crow, had been greatly interested in the proceedings. And after the squirrels had been housed in their new quarters, he paid them frequent visits. He'd sit upon the top of the enclosure and watch them as they darted in and out of the openings in the old locust. And as he watched, he'd mutter to himself:

"Ho, ho, ho! Look at them run! Ho, ho, ho!"

Mr. Filbert, just about this time, bought a litter of Dalmatian puppies about six weeks old. There were four of them, strong, lively little fellows and very well bred.

"A good purchase," said Mr. Filbert. "The coach-dog is coming back into favor. We'll get a nice profit from these."

There was at this season of the year a brisk trade in hounds and field-dogs of various kinds. Setters and pointer pups, basset hounds, beagles and Chesapeakes left the shop with comfortable regularity. Dogs of mature age, broken for field use, were also asked for. And at the end of October the kennels were almost without sporting tenants.

But like the Dalmatians, pups of other breeds came in. There were

three Airedale brothers of a half-year old who were new to the shop and much admired; there was a grand young bull terrier, white as snow, and with all the manners of a show dog; also a Doberman pinscher and a pair of alert-looking Schnauzers.

Most of these dogs were problems to Mr. Filbert at the time of purchase. People would write to him; they had seen his advertisements in the newspapers and magazines; and they'd say they had such and such finely bred pups which they'd like to sell him. He'd get out his little single-seater and pay the letter-writer a visit. More often than not the offered pups were crossbred. Sometimes they were not, but of a quality so poor that it was a waste of money to buy them.

"But I must keep trying," said Mr. Filbert. "Several times I haven't been able to answer a call, and later found I'd missed something worthwhile."

THE people who had breeding kennels with only one or two types of dog had none of Mr. Filbert's troubles. They could settle back with no uneasy moments. They were always sure of what they had to sell. But Mr. Filbert had to depend entirely upon his own knowledge.

"When you are purchasing a grown dog," he said, "it's not so uncertain; but pups are sometimes hard to judge. At a month old one of them may look wonderful, and at three months the same one may be impossible. They change so as they grow. If they have a bad quality, it seems to take a little time for it to show."

But the dog-shop had troubles of another sort, and sometimes it came from surprising directions.

One morning Julia Havey, the barber's daughter, was speaking to Mrs. Filbert at Sam's Main Street Market.

"Mother's in an awful way!" Julia said. "We just can't cheer her up."

"Isn't she feeling well?" asked Mrs. Filbert.

"Oh, I guess she's well enough," replied Julia. "But ever since she lost that ring, she's been in a state."

"Lost a ring?"

"Oh, hasn't she told you about that? Yes, she lost her wedding-ring."

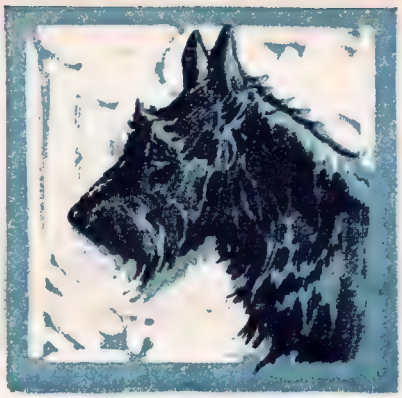
"Oh, dear me!" said Mrs. Filbert. "That *is* too bad, isn't it?"

"It's got her worried. And it's getting Father worried too, because she never stops talking about it. It's not only because it was her wedding-ring that makes her fret, but she has ideas about it. What you might call beliefs. She thinks it's terrible bad luck to lose a wedding-ring. And to have one stolen, is worse."

Mrs. Filbert looked at Julia in surprise.

"Does she think it was stolen?"

"She's sure it was," said Julia.



"Well, who on earth could have stolen it, right off her finger!"

"Sometimes," said Julia, "she doesn't wear it. She'll leave it on a stand or on the mantelpiece in her room of a morning if she's going to do certain kinds of work that day. And that's what she did on the day she lost it."

"Well, well!" said Mrs. Filbert.

"How anybody could get into the house in broad daylight, with us all there, I don't know," said Julia. "But the ring's gone, and she's terribly worried."

Mrs. Filbert repeated this news to Mr. Filbert when she got home, and he looked very serious about it.

"Something is always happening," he said. "If it's not one thing it's another."

He went no further than this with her; but later he took the matter up with Michael.

"Maybe she left it in some other place," said the boy. "People do that sometimes, and then forget."

"It may be that's what she's done," said Mr. Filbert. "But, Michael, I'm afraid maybe it's been something else."

Michael was busy with the show-window of the shop. He'd just taken out a dozen or so cages of birds and was making it ready for the Dalmatian pups. But he caught the worried expression on Mr. Filbert's face and paused in his work.

"How do you mean, something else?" he asked.

"You know, Michael, when you first brought that crow home five years or so ago, I told you what crows are. And I've never changed my mind about them. They're thieves!"

"Now, wait!" said Michael, getting serious also. "Do you mean you think Chug stole Mrs. Havey's ring?"

"Well, he's around the neighborhood a good bit," said Mr. Filbert. "And Havey likes to have him over there sometimes to entertain his customers. And he's been in the living-room of the Havey house. I've heard Julia say so. She's taken him in to show him off to her friends. And give a crow a chance, Michael, and he'll take advantage of it."

"Well, that's a pretty bad thing to say about the old fellah," said Michael.

"But," said Mr. Filbert, "I'm not really charging him with it. I'm only saying, knowing the crow family as I do, that it might be so. I hope it isn't," said Mr. Filbert, "for in a great many ways he's a likable bird. I think he has a sense of humor."

"I think so too," said the boy. "And of course, a crow *might* see things different from the way people see them. Stealing might not be stealing to him. Maybe he sees something and he just takes it. With no hard feelings."

"Anyway, the crow family are thieves," said Mr. Filbert, "and I wouldn't be surprised if it is shown by and by that he took the ring."

Michael was disturbed by this. He knew Chug was attracted by small, colorful things. He knew he picked up odds and ends here and there and hid them in the garden or in the eaves of the barn. Bright things, like bits of brass hardware, new nails, excited his fancy. One time, so Michael recalled, the crow almost liberated a group of finches by his constant picking at the bright metal fastening of their cage door.

He spoke to Mrs. Filbert about it, knowing she favored Chug.

"I have to watch him when the kitchen window's open," she admitted. "I've found him here a few times. And once he was chuckling like an old rascal over the spoons; I really believe he'd been away with one of them if it hadn't been too big for him to carry."

Michael shook his head over this.

"I suppose it might be he took Mrs. Havey's ring," he said. "Not meaning any harm, you know, but just because, as Mr. Filbert says, it's a crow's nature to do such things."

JIMMY HENRY spoke to Michael one day while they were up in a chestnut tree, taking an account of what an early frost had done for the nuts.

"Last night I stopped in at Shugru's to get a soda," Jimmy said. "And that Olly Davis was there: you know, he's a friend of Julia Havey's. Well, he was talking, and he said as soon as he saw Chug was at Havey's, he knew something was going to be missing. He said nobody ought to have a crow. The only thing to do with them, he said, was to wring their necks."

Mrs. Havey had never mentioned anything having to do with Chug to either Mrs. Filbert or her husband. And Julia hadn't. But it was plain to Michael that suspicion had crept

abroad, and that the finger was directly leveled at the black-coated old conversationalist of the dog-shop.

That evening before dark, Michael got a ladder and put it up against the side of the barn. He looked under the eaves, which he knew was one of Chug's hiding-places. He found various things—metal buttons, broken fragments of a dollar watch, a piece of gold braid, screws and nails, a shoe-buckle, some tin bottle tops, bit of a knife-blade.

Michael laughed.

"The old boy's playing misers!" he said. "He's rich, and hiding it all away."

But Mrs. Havey's ring was not amongst the loot either outside or inside the barn, though Michael put in parts of a number of days searching. Afterward he tried the garage, but with no better fortune. Still later he began uncovering places along the garden fence that seemed to be favorite spots for the crow.

NOW just about this time Pooch grew interested in the proceedings. The reason being that he had bones buried here and there which he didn't want disturbed. He watched jealously. Any of his property that was dug up, he at once took charge of and planted in another place. However, that was not all. Pooch had always been keen for digging. He'd been warned about it more than once. But now that he saw Michael engaged in it, he probably thought the rules were suspended, and began to industriously assist him.

But neither of them turned up anything of consequence. Michael, discouraged, put the matter of the ring out of his mind. And no sooner had the case quieted down, than something happened!

Probably we'd better let Michael tell about this.

"While I was hunting around," the boy told Mr. Filbert and Mrs. Filbert, "I often noticed that Pooch'd stop and look at me, just as if he was saying: 'Well, there it is. Now what next?' Later on, he'd just mouse around, sniffing, as if he'd found out there wasn't anything, and had made up his mind he wasn't going to dig any more."

"Animals get discouraged when they don't understand a thing," said Mr. Filbert. "Humans do too, very often, as a matter of fact."

"What I think," said Michael, "is that just about that time he began to get an idea of something."

"Oh, Michael!" said Mrs. Filbert. "You don't think Pooch *knew!*"

"Well," said the boy, "I didn't say that. I said he began to have some idea. And it might be he never got any further than that. You know, I'm with Pooch a good bit, and maybe I'm better acquainted with him than anyone else. I got thinking afterward that about the time he knocked off digging, he'd come to know I wasn't searching for the things he'd hidden. Because I didn't pay any attention to them when I turned them up, and let him take them and put them in other places.

"Besides that," said Michael, "maybe he also noticed that when I dug up something of Chug's I was interested; and that I hunted in that spot to see if there was anything more. Dogs are wise," he told them, "especially them that have been kicked around like Pooch must have been when he was a little tramp, before we got him.

"But I wasn't thinking of that," said the boy. "All I had in my mind was: did old Chug steal Mrs. Havey's wedding-ring; and if he did, where had he put it? And then Pooch showed me something. While I was turning up some places around the barn, I heard him bark. He was scratching at the screen around where we have the squirrels, and he seemed to be asking me to look at something inside. I looked," went on Michael, "and what did I see but Chug on top of the old locust tree.

"'Now,' I says to myself, 'how did he get in there? It's covered all around and all over the top.'

"Well, anyway, Pooch had found the place, and that's what he was scratching at. I looked at it; there had been a little break in the wire netting, and I could see where Chug had been working at it. You know he's got a terrible strong beak, and he's clever at using it. He'd unwound the wire where it was twisted together until he'd made a hole big enough to get through."

"The rascal!" said Mr. Filbert. "What will he be up to next?"

"What did you do then, Michael?" asked Mrs. Filbert.

"Nothing just then. I thought I'd wait until sometime when he was out of the cage, and then I'd go in and look around. He sat on top of the tree-trunk, and he was jawing at the squirrels; and they were frisking around as though they were making fun of him.

"Next day I went into the yard because of a lot of barking by Pooch; and there he was at the hole in the cage, and there was Chug inside and on the top of the locust stump, poking around with his bill. And then he began to squawk and jaw, and ruffle up his feathers just as he'd been doing the other time I saw him there. And I knew he had a place up there where he hid things. And the squirrels knew it. They'd watched him, and as soon as he went away, they'd take what he'd hidden, and *they'd* hide it.

"So," said Michael, "I got a step-ladder and went into the cage. And I began searching around in the holes up in the tree-trunk where the squirrels had made their nests for the winter. And in one of them, under some dried leaves, I found Mrs. Havey's ring."

"That old rascal!" repeated Mr. Filbert. "He's a robber, just as I thought he'd be."

"Oh, no!" said Mrs. Filbert. "I don't think he is. He's just a collector of things."

"Anyway," said Michael, "the ring's found, and after this nobody'll have him around and not watch him. Besides, now I know all his hiding-places. And every once in a while I'll look through them and see what he's got that's new."

"He's really a very sociable bird," said Mrs. Filbert to her husband. "And he *is* amusing."

MR. FILBERT thought so too. But he didn't care to admit it. So he said:

"Very well. We shall see. But he must behave himself. We can't have a thieving bird around the place."

"But what I was saying about Pooch," Michael told them, "was to get this: Of course dogs don't think the way people do. But they do have what you call observation, and they do remember things, and they can put one thing with another.

"And I'm sure," the boy went on, "when Pooch showed me the place where Chug had unwound the wire and did the next thing to pointing out his new place for hiding things, he was saying that maybe the thing I was looking for was there, almost as plain as if he'd put it in words."

"That may very well be," agreed Mr. Filbert. "Pooch is quite a clever young dog."

To be concluded in our forthcoming September issue.

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 81

H	A	R	S	H			S	U	I	T	E	S		
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SPECIAL MISSION

A Signal Corps officer finds battle aplenty in these 1943 United States . . . A complete novel,

by Richard Sale

LIEUTENANT PAUL KIMBROUGH took a last look out the Pullman window before he put on his heavy coat. The day was dusking, and he found it the ugliest twilight he had ever seen. The howling wind whipped across the foothills of the Alleghenies through which the train rolled southward on the high iron, already two hours late on its Washington-to-Nashville run. The hard flakes beat against the window; as far as he could see, there was snow-smoke, roiled by the wind and whipped along the right-of-way like tumbleweeds of frozen steam. He did not look upon his departure from the comfort of the Pullman with anticipation.

The conductor came back through the car and leaned over his seat. "You're off in five minutes, Lieutenant."

"Thanks," Paul said.

"I think you're crazy to climb out at Fox Hill," said the conductor. He had a kindly voice despite his long grave look. "You ought to stay with us until Chanley Forge. That's a good-sized place. You could put up at a hotel for the night, and motor over to Southford in the morning. I don't take it you've ever been to Southford before?"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't," Paul Kimbrough said. "Never been on the low side of the Mason-Dixon before. What's wrong with Fox Hill?"

The conductor joined him on the seat. "Nothing wrong with it, only it aint what you think it is. I reckon you expect a town of sorts, and maybe a bus or a cab. Fox Hill's just a flag stop, and nothing else. The station is a half-open shed. The only reason it's a stop at all is on account of the college in Southford. Nobody ever thought to run a spur over to Southford, and the college boys had to get off somewheres to get to it. They used to have buses meet 'em, and drive 'em the eight miles. Nowadays college boys are about as plentiful as rubber."

Paul Kimbrough took another look at the maelstrom of snow and ice piling up in sweeping drifts. "You don't think I'd be able to get a taxi?"

"Son, you wouldn't be able to get anything—except maybe pneumonia. You've got an eight-mile hike east on the highway to reach Southford, and with night coming on, and this snow piling up, it just aint smart to try it. Nothing so important that it can't wait till tomorrow, is it?"

Paul Kimbrough smiled faintly. "I'm afraid so."

"A girl, eh?" The conductor grinned.

"Could be."

"I was noticing the insignia on your uniform, them crossed flags. Signal Corps, aint it?"

"Yes."

"Got a nephew studying at Fort Monmouth. They're making a lineman out of him—he claims he can climb a pole like a monkey. That wouldn't be your line, would it, Lieutenant?"

"I'm in radio," Paul Kimbrough said.

"Uh-huh," the conductor said. "Well, take my advice and go on to Chanley Forge. You're liable to get so snowbound out there on the highway tonight, nobody'd ever hear from you again." He chuckled.

"I think," Paul said, pretending a moment's thought, "that I'll risk the hike. There's still some daylight, and I might get a lift on the pike from someone. I appreciate your help. But I'll get along all right."

The conductor was not enthusiastic. Paul could see visions of St. Bernards and brandy-casks in the old boy's troubled eyes. "Tell you what," said the conductor gravely. "In case you get into trouble, keep an eye peeled for the old Spa."

"All right," Paul Kimbrough said.

"You sound as if you already heard about it."

Paul said quickly, "Oh, no. What is it?"

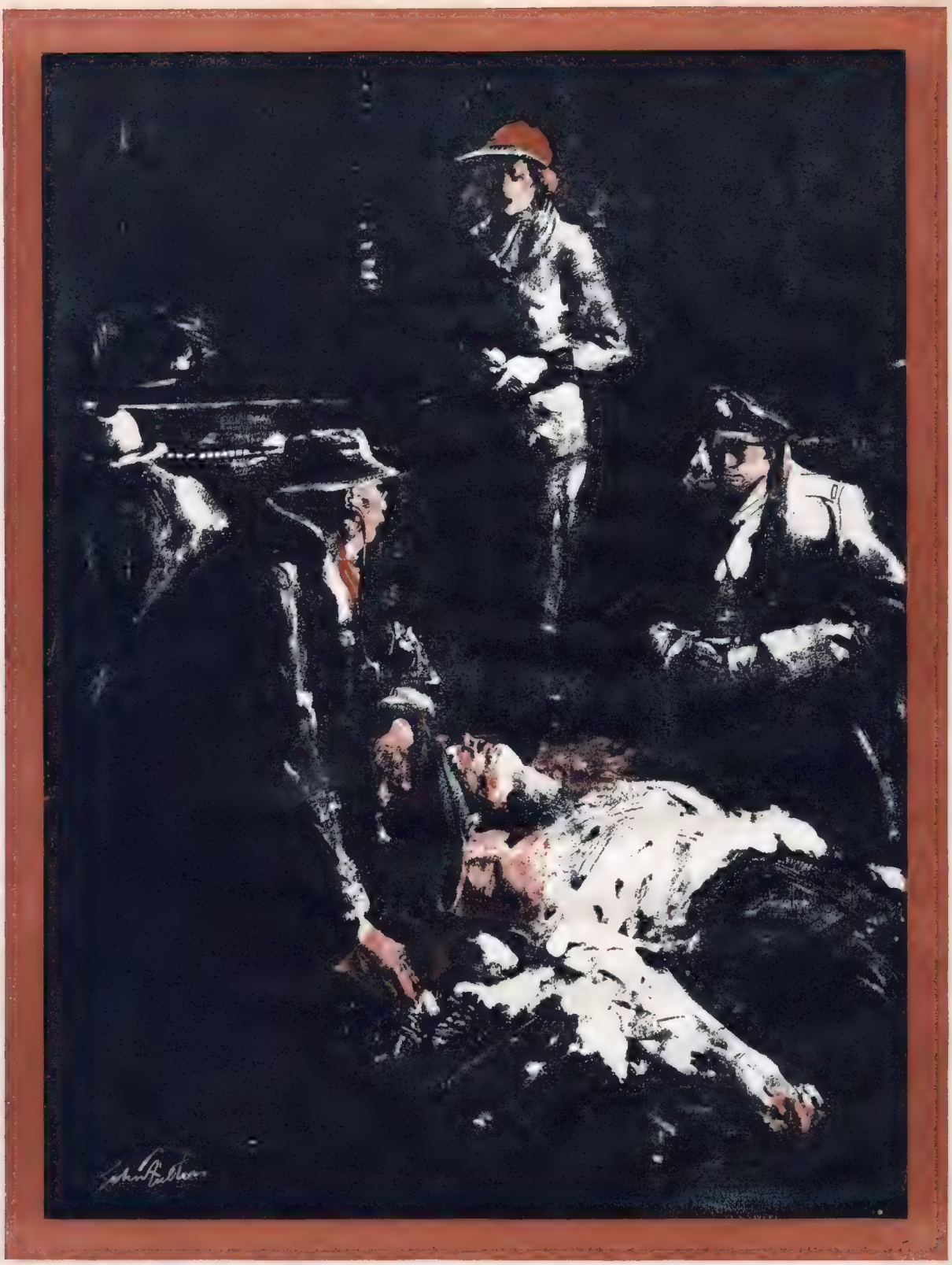
"Just a spa. Great old place. Used to be a social center back in the days of Stonewall Jackson before the Civil War busted Virginia wide open. Been closed now for forty years, but the roof's never fallen in, and you could take shelter there. Better than nothing. It's about halfway to Southford—right on the highway. You can't miss the old brick gateways, two of 'em. If you're petering out about then, you could rest up inside. It aint haunted, last I heard." He grinned.

"I'll remember to look for it," said Paul Kimbrough.

Under him, the brakes were hugging the wheels, and steel sang. The train slowed perceptibly. "That's you," said the conductor, and went out to the platform, where he got a lantern. Paul turned up his collar and took his handbag.

Finally, the train stopped. Paul jumped down into the snow, and was astonished when it rose to his knees. "Good luck, son!" shouted the conductor over the whistling wind.

"Thanks!" Paul called. He stood back as the conductor high-balled the engineer with the lantern. The long line of cars moved southward once more; presently the flickering marker lights on the observation car vanished behind the wall of flying flakes.



"No gun," Paul said. "Then this wasn't exactly an accident," Dr. Mitchell observed.

Only then did Paul stoop and pick up the gun which had dropped into the snow when he made his jump. It was a short-nosed, distinctly unmilitary .32 Smith & Wesson belly-gun, and the under-side of the barrel was scarred from the pressure of the spring clip in the holster on his belt beneath his tunic. He slipped the gun under his tunic and jammed it down into the holster. It felt good there—very reassuring. He took out the telegram in his pocket and reread it. It said, enigmatically: "C&O TO FOX HILLS, LV WASHINGTON 1204P MEET YOU AT OLD SPA, SOUTHFORD PIKE. AMES."

The conductor had not exaggerated. He had understated. The open shed with FOX HILLS name-plated on it was half-buried under the drifts. That was all. Not even stop-look-and-listen signs. The highway crossed the railroad east-west. A marker pointing east said, *"Southford—8 miles."* The highway it indicated was barely outlined, for the snow had covered the edges of the road. He tightened his coat about his neck, and started tramping, watching for tire-marks.

There were none. Darkness fell, but the snow on the pike lay smooth and unviolated. By then, Paul Kimbrough knew that he was going to have to warm up and catch his breath at the Spa. The astonishing depth of snow, up to his knees most of the way, made walking difficult and exhausting. He thought bleakly that Walter Ames might have chosen a less rugged rendezvous.

The sight of the old brick gateways of the Spa was heartening. They rose off the highway like tombstones, but the lee sides were bare of snow, and brick showed through. He turned in through one of the gateways, and followed the drive with enthusiasm. It electrified him to realize, suddenly, that he was having an easier time of it, walking in ruts. Car ruts! An automobile had gone in here very recently, for the ruts were sharp, and with the weight of driving snow, they would not have been so distinct if old. Thoroughly alive again, he ran along the ruts until, through the snow, he saw a faint light. Simultaneously, he came upon the broken steps of a great sweeping veranda.

It was entirely dark. He had a flashlight in his bag, but he hesitated to open the bag, for the snow would ruin his effects. He felt his way up the steps, gingerly, avoided those which were no longer there, and found solid footing on the veranda, where he came to a broken window through which the room beyond was dimly visible.

Some one called: "Who's there? Who is it?" A girl's voice, husky and uneasy!

"Just a wayfaring stranger," he answered carefully. "On my way to Southford from Fox Hill. The storm got a little too heavy for me. How do I get in there?"

"Go along the porch to your right," the girl called. He hadn't seen her yet. "There's a door along there. It's open. Be careful of the old furniture in the lobby."

CHAPTER TWO

KIMBROUGH felt along the wall until he found the open door, and he went in. As he faltered through the musty lobby in darkness, he banged his shins once or twice before a blinding flashlight poked into the dark and illumined the way.

"Over here," said the girl.

"Thanks," said Paul Kimbrough cheerfully. "This place looks like something out of 'Seven Keys to Baldpate.'"

He walked into the light, feeling immodest in its glare. When he reached it, it went out. "Come in," she said. She had a very nice voice. "Who are you?"

"My name's Kimbrough," he said, "—Paul—Lieutenant, U.S. Army Signal Corps."

"Can you see now?"

"Not yet. . . . yes. That's better."

The room into which he stepped had been a ballroom. From the ceiling a resplendent glass-tiered chandelier still hung, and around the green and gold brocaded walls were French chairs, motheaten, dusty and bedraggled, but still rather proud. To his right, an old piano stood, massive and silent, its ivory keys yellowed with age. He could see these, because a gasoline lamp on the piano cast a brilliant glow.

The girl was dressed in a heavy ski suit, with a scarlet ski-cap over hair that stole golden highlights from the lamp. Her cheeks were almost as bright as the cap, from cold, and her ears were hidden, under muffs. She watched him with half-opened lips, her eyes unnaturally bright. Nor did she look happy.

On the floor he saw a man stretched out, and another man working over him.

"Oh," Paul Kimbrough said quietly. His face fell. He set down his bag. "Please let me help."

"I'm Ellen Mitchell," she said. "This is my father, Dr. Mitchell."

Paul nodded, both to her and her father. The Doctor barely took cognizance of him. He had stripped the man of coat and vest and was opening the fellow's shirt. It was bitter cold in the damp room. Dr. Mitchell had a gentle, whimsical sort of face with an inconspicuous gray mustache; but now it was grave, severe and frustrated. His white brows were knitting, and his glasses had slid down the cold smooth line of his nose.

Paul asked: "What happened to him?" He stared at the wounded man, feeling empty.

Dr. Mitchell spoke to his daughter without raising his eyes. "My bag, Ellen. Right here, beside him, please."

She put the black bag down at the indicated spot and opened it. "Want the gas-lamp on the floor too, Dad?"

"Might be better."

She took the lamp from the piano and placed it on the floor. Paul went around the other side of the man on the floor to see what was wrong. Dr. Mitchell peeled back the shirt, which was stained. Next instant, Paul saw three bullet wounds, and much blood.

"Ellen," Dr. Mitchell said shortly, "if it's too much for you, go sit down by the piano. . . . You can help me, young man."

"I don't mind," Ellen said shakily, but she sat down.

Paul knelt beside the Doctor. "I don't like his color," he said.

The injured man was gray. He made strange little movements with his left hand. It went around in circles. The fellow's eyes were wide open, but they were glassy. Little moans lay muffled in his throat, and his mouth moved. His skin seemed to grow grayer, and he had trouble breathing.

Dr. Mitchell sighed. "Nothing to do. He hasn't got the chance of a snowball in hell. I can't go probing for bullets here. He's in no shape for it. We'll have to get him back to town to the hospital."

He cleaned the wounds as he spoke, and plugged them with cotton. Paul Kimbrough said: "You must have just reached here."

"About ten minutes ago," Dr. Mitchell said. "We had a devil of a time finding him. Do you see a gun around any place?"

Paul took the lamp and searched around under the piano. He found no gun. Instead, he found a familiar object, a walkie-talkie. This was a radio transmitter-receiver, for ultra high-frequency work. It was battery-operated, and so small, it could be held in the hand, applied to the head, so that the mouth would speak into a carbon microphone while the ear listened at an earphone. The brief antenna was a four-foot chrome rod, attached to the top of the set rigidly. Since the power output of such a

rig was less than quarter of a watt, its range was limited—up to five miles. It was a gadget which had evolved from Signal Corps laboratories for the use of advance patrols in combat areas.

What it was doing on the floor of a deserted resort in Virginia, beside a dying man, was something else again. "No gun," Paul said.

"Then this wasn't exactly an accident," Dr. Mitchell said, disturbed. He was going to lose a patient, an infrequent episode in his practice, and always an unnerving one.

"No gun," Paul said. "But there is this." He held up the walkie-talkie.

"What is it?" Dr. Mitchell asked, scowling at it.

"Portable transmitter, Dad," Ellen said. "If that's a half-wave antenna on it, the frequency is somewhere around two meters. That's way up—a very short wave."

Paul Kimbrough repressed a gape, puzzling at her.

"I know a bit about it," she said parsimoniously.

Her father interrupted: "We'll have trouble in the snow. Lieutenant, you can carry him with me. Ellen, you take the lamp and my bag and that gadget—I presume it's important—can you manage?"

"Easily," she said.

"Hate to move him," Dr. Mitchell said gloomily. "Nothing else to do. You drive, dear—the hospital, fast as you can make it. I'm afraid he's not going to last."

"I was going to ask for a lift into Southford," Paul Kimbrough said, "but circumstances seem to have made and answered my request."

They both looked blankly at him. "Yes," said the Doctor. He stared suspiciously. "You've never seen him before?"

"I?" Paul said. "Never. Who is he?"

"Only thing I could find was a paper crediting him as Walter Ames, a senior field operative of the Federal Communications Commission."

"Ames?" Paul said. The telegram in his pocket burned like a hot coal. "Ames. Never heard of him."

"Well," said Dr. Mitchell. "Let's hurry."

PAUL took the wounded man under the armpits; Dr. Mitchell took the feet. They followed Ellen through the old dark lobby, where the gas-lamp brightened it for Paul to see. It was strange to look upon the old furniture, the front desk, mail cubicles, the grand stairway leading upstairs. Even rugs remained. Everything was decayed, and nothing was whole. Tourists and adventurous boys had wrecked most of it. There were few panes in the windows.

When they reached the car, shuffling as they went because of the patient's weight, Ellen opened the back door. The Doctor backed in, still holding to the feet, and Paul exerted himself to bring the rest of the man inside. They placed him on the back seat. He was mumbling and groaning. "You sit up with Ellen," Dr. Mitchell said. "You can help her watch the side of the road. Very bad driving."

"Right."

Dr. Mitchell took the gasoline lamp from Ellen then, and walked off into the driveway of the Spa. He only went a short way, looking down into the snow with caution. When he came back, he took the other leg of the driveway, paused, finally came back to the car and climbed in. He turned the lamp out. "Drive, Ellen."

It suddenly occurred to Paul Kimbrough what the Doctor had done, and he felt embarrassed. "Doctor," he said with mild indignation, "you didn't think I had anything to do with this man's shooting?"

"I wasn't sure," said the Doctor, unabashed. He was frowning. "But obviously you did walk in from Fox Hill. Your footsteps in the snow are sharp and deep and fresh. I wasn't sure. Your arrival was so damned timely. I'm sorry."

Paul said: "I see what you mean."

They sat in the strange darkness of white snow, the silence punctuated only by the eerie whining of the wind under the eaves of the Spa. The girl had warmed the sedan's engine, and when it took the throttle without hesitation, she went into gear and spun the wheels.

"Not stuck!" Dr. Mitchell said nervously.

"Relax, Dad," Ellen said. "Here we go."

Her chains caught and held, and they moved out along the exit drive. Paul watched the margin of the drive on his side for her. "Some one else has driven through here," he said abruptly. "Look at those ruts. They're old."

"I saw them," Dr. Mitchell said.

But instead of following the exit roadway, the faint ruts curved off around the back of the Spa and disappeared.

Ellen said briefly: "The old stables are that way."

"Stop the car." Paul Kimbrough put his hand on the door-handle expectantly.

She stopped the car reluctantly and watched him with eyes which had softened and become anxious for him. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm leaving you," he said. "I know you can't stop over. That fellow's got to get to a hospital. But someone tried to murder him. It comes to that, doesn't it?"

"Yes," Dr. Mitchell said quietly.

"Someone took him for a ride," Paul said. "He didn't walk all the way out here to shoot himself. He came in a car—his car or someone else's car. The man who shot him must have come with him. Only one sign of car ruts, and no sign of footprints. . . . You can see yourself the ruts don't *leave* the Spa. They circle back to the stables. We're breaking virgin snow dead ahead. So, the man who did this would seem to be still on the premises."

He saw Ellen Mitchell shiver openly. She whispered: "I kept feeling someone was watching us while we were in there."

"Never mind," Dr. Mitchell said. "Please start the car. We're wasting time."

"I'm getting out," Paul interrupted. "I'll check on those ruts and look this place over. When you get to town, you can report it to the police and send them out."

"Sit still," Dr. Mitchell said sharply. "Drive, Ellen."

Ellen started the car and spun her wheels. They moved off through the gateways where the snow had not been rutted. Paul Kimbrough still held his hand on the door-handle. He had half a notion to open it and step out, for the car wasn't moving fast. Then he changed his mind.

"Okay," he said, his voice tight. "It's your party, Doctor. I might have found something back there."

"Three more bullets perhaps," the Doctor said evenly. "Your bravery is appreciated, but it's also foolhardy. You're not armed. It's a police case, and no affair of yours or mine. No telling what you might find back there. I have no intention of being responsible in any way for you. I don't know what's been going on, but obviously it's not for amateurs like us. We'll leave it to the police."

"As you say," Paul replied, with careful grace.

Chapter Three

THEY drove in silence. It was hard to find the road, even in the headlights' glare. Ellen Mitchell drove slowly, occasionally glancing at him, for help. He said, "You're okay," when she did, indicating she was clear at his side of the highway.

"How the devil were you called on this?" he said suddenly, half-turning to face the Doctor in the rear. "Don't tell me that old wreck of a place had a telephone!"

"There's no telephone, of course," Dr. Mitchell replied. He sounded puzzled. "It must have been a local call. A

man just rang me, made certain I was a doctor, and then said some one had been shot, out at the Spa—and would I go right out?"

"Who was he?"

"He didn't say."

Paul hung his chin on his chest and brooded. "It doesn't make sense, any of it," he rumbled. "The man who phoned you—how could he know about anybody being shot, when we could see from the snow that no one left the Spa."

"The wounded man might have used the transmitter to tell someone else, similarly equipped, of his trouble," Ellen Mitchell said.

Paul glanced at her in admiration. She knew her stuff. More than that, it occurred to him that she was a pretty girl, with a forthright, capable look. Her theory required no answer; it was the only possibility. They all sat in tense silence as she drove, and the wounded man breathed raucously.

The first lights of Southford were breaking through the snow when the wounded man exerted himself and tried to speak. Over the creak of the crushed snow under their wheels, he said brokenly, *"Downstairs—down—"*

Paul knelt and looked back. Dr. Mitchell was working over his patient. Nothing about the wounded man had changed except for a thin trickle of blood which hung at one corner of his mouth, evidence of a lung wound. His breathing had become cacophonously ragged, and very hard and slow on the intake.

"Who shot you?" Dr. Mitchell asked soothingly. "Tell us who shot you?"

"Winezel," said the wounded man.

"What did he say?"

"He said Winezel," Paul replied. "But I don't think he finished. He cut himself off."

"Tell him—tell Daniel Webster—" said the wounded man, and then collapsed on the seat, his breath rattling heavily in his throat as he struggled to live.

Ellen shivered. Paul Kimbrough touched her shoulder with his hand and steadied her without speaking.

"This is the end," Dr. Mitchell said sadly. "He won't come around again."

They came over the crest of a broad hill. Southford College lay against the eastern slope of the hill, its white-pillared red brick buildings stretching out as far as the visibility would permit Paul seeing them. Then the town flourished like a mushroom, and in a minute more, they were racing down well-lighted Main Street for the hospital. Ellen skidded the car to a halt in front of it.

Paul Kimbrough helped the Doctor carry the wounded man in. Internes aided, inside, and the patient went into Emergency. Dr. Mitchell shook hands hastily. "You've been very much of a help, Lieutenant," he said. "Sorry we couldn't meet under happier circumstances. Good luck to you! Have Ellen drop you off wherever you want to go."

"Thanks," Paul Kimbrough said. "You haven't seen the last of me. I'll telephone you tomorrow to see how this all came out. Sorry I—well, I still think it was a smart idea for me to stay out there and take a thorough look around. But now that I'm in town, I'm just as glad. Good night, Doctor."

"Good luck," Dr. Mitchell said, and disappeared into the room.

Paul Kimbrough went out into the snow again and climbed into the car. He smiled at Ellen wanly. "This is that," he said. "All day I'd been bored stiff on the train." He took a deep breath. "Does this sort of thing go on all the time in this nice sleepy Southern town?"

"Hardly," she said. She had lighted a cigarette in his absence, and passed him one. "Was he still breathing?"

"Yes. But his chances are—nil. . . . Your dad said for you to return home. If you could drop me off—"

"Of course." She looked a little brighter. "A hotel, I presume. The biggest or the best?"

"No," he said, remembering his alibi for a Southford stopover. "Do you know a girl named Margaret Rigby?"

She stared at him. "Yes."

"Tall, dark, with an accent out of the deep South? When she's pouring it on, I mean."

"Yes, I know Margaret."

"You may drop me on her doorstep, but gently, and my blessing will be upon you."

She shrugged, and started the car.

"Are you an old friend of Margaret's?" she asked carefully.

He smiled. "Not exactly old. Met her in New York at an officers' lounge. There were four and twenty wolves supplicating for her honeysuckled hand, and Kimbrough landed it, for the length of his furlough there. My charming personality, you know."

"I see," she said succinctly.

SHE drove him across town to the Southford College campus once more, and cut down a side-street where she stopped before a modern white Colonial. "This is it." She extended her hand.

He shook hands with her. "I told your dad I'd call him to see how this turned out. My curiosity is piqued by that Signal Corps gadget. . . . Where is it?"

"In back. The police will have to have it."

"I suppose." He smiled candidly. "Nice knowing you, Ellen Mitchell. Thanks for the buggy ride. I'll be around town for a while. I'll see you again."

"I think so," Ellen said, nodding coolly. She watched him to the front door.

Paul rang the doorbell. A colored butler in a white coat opened the door.

"Yassuh?"

"Lieutenant Kimbrough to see Miss Rigby."

"Miz Rigby 'spectin' yo', suh?"

"No," Paul grinned. "It's a surprise." He followed the butler in, reached the center of the hall, from which he could look into the living-room. It was a fine scene. A roaring fire on the hearth, and Margaret sat beside it, curled up in a club chair, writing a letter. She raised her head and called: "Duke, who is it?"

Then she sprang to her feet, electrified. She stood rigidly erect, and she looked frightened. One thing about Margaret, he reflected brightly: there was no mistaking her sex. Her natural endowment would have been sufficient, but she accentuated this. Her full dark hair hanging to her shoulders, with that super-dark red lipstick abundantly tattooed on her full mouth, made her look voluptuous. She was tall and statuesque, and she had enormous eyes, which she used expressively.

"Paul!" she said sharply. Then she lowered her voice: "Paul, what are you doing here?" There was no trace of the rich honeysuckle accent which had flowed so easily in New York.

"Ten days' leave," he said. "I couldn't think of anyone else I wanted to spend them with more than you."

There was fear in her eyes. "You mustn't talk like that," she said, crossing the room to him. "Not here. . . . Paul, you shouldn't have come *here!*"

Someone called from upstairs: "Who is it, darling? If it's Schustler, tell him I'll be right down."

"It's an old friend of mine," she called. "I want you to meet him, Nick. Come down."

"Righto, darling."

Paul Kimbrough felt an uneasy chill creep slowly down his back. He looked into her face warily. He gestured upstairs with his thumb. "Who—"

"Paul, you mustn't say anything about New York—about us," she whispered. "Tell him I met you at Auntie's, and that you took me to the theater. All harmless fun."

"Which it was," Paul said, puzzled. "I don't see—"

"Paul, *please!*" Margaret Rigby breathed. There were steps on the stairs; hearing them, she tried to brighten. She was only fair in her effort. The man who came in was pleasant and professorial. He looked older than he was, and he clenched a pipe rigidly between his teeth, smiling hospitably. Without the black and rather bushy mustache, he would have been good-looking. He had shrewd gray eyes, bright but remote, as if they were seeing three hours ahead of the present.

Margaret said: "Nick—I want you to meet a friend, Paul Kimbrough, who just about saved my life in New York. Paul, my husband, Nick Rigby."

Paul looked momentarily blank. He regained composure then and shook hands with Rigby.

"You know how deadly Aunt Belle's ideas of a gay metropolitan vacation are," Margaret said lightly to her husband. "If she hadn't introduced Paul, I'd have perished from ennui."

"Well, Kimbrough," Rigby said cheerfully, "thanks for saving me the expense of a burial, and returning the lady to me in a good mood!"

"On the contrary," Paul Kimbrough said, "she did more for me. You're aware of the fact a soldier's life is lacking in tinsel. We had a very gay time. I'm glad to meet you. Margaret hadn't told me much about you." He glanced at her with a tight smile.

She moved to Rigby and took his arm, half standing behind him as if he were a shield. "Oh, Nick's just a fuddy-duddy. An absent-minded professor, eh, darling?"

"Of course," Rigby said shrewdly, his eyes sharp.

Regaining confidence, she laughed too shrilly and threw back her hair. "Well, Paul, this *is* a surprise! Whatever are you doing in Southford? It's the last place on earth I'd ever have expected to see you again."

"Don't be so modest, old girl," Nicholas Rigby smiled. "The man came to look upon your splendor once more, eh, Kimbrough?" He winked and showed fine teeth.

Paul smiled broadly too. He felt that the situation was thoroughly unpleasant, and he replied with the care he would have taken crossing thin ice: "The idea has its points," he said, "but unfortunately, the Signal Corps wouldn't regard it as a legitimate errand." His mind raced, but the best he could think of was, "Matter of fact, this was a special mission here."

Rigby said: "Will you be in town long?"

"I don't think so. Perhaps a day or two. It ought not to take long to clear up this little matter." Paul was pleased that the story had stuck—no doubt of it. Talent scouts should have seen this bent for histrionics, with which he surprised even himself.

"Come in and sit down," Rigby said. "Come all the way from New York?"

"No, Washington."

"Washington!" Rigby said. "That means the C. & O. And that means Fox Hill. How on earth did you reach town, old boy? On a night like this, it's a wonder you weren't marooned in the wilds. Virginia is the damnedest State, you know. In spring, it's the most beautiful spot in the world; but in winter, it can look like a page from the Russian front."

"I walked some of the way," Paul Kimbrough said, "and then caught a lift with Dr. Mitchell and his daughter—very lucky for me. I really can't stay."

"Oh, see here!" Rigby said. "Margaret, you're very quiet—persuade the man to abide with us."

"He'd probably rather settle himself at the hotel," she said hopefully.

"He can stay right here," Rigby said. "Hotel indeed, Meg! Where's that Southern hospitality?" He grinned at Paul like a Cheshire. "Come on, Kimbrough. I'll assign you a cell, and then we'll see if we can scrape together a vitamin. I'll wager you haven't dined at all."

"Ate on the train," Paul said. He was coldly amused at the expression of panic on Margaret's face. "Thanks, Rigby, but I've really got to go to a hotel. I'll be moving around town a bit, and I'd rather not disturb your household. I'll run up to the Robert Lee."

Rigby seemed honestly disappointed. "Very well. But you'll have dinner with us tomorrow evening, around seven, eh? I couldn't help noticing your insignia—not the lieutenant bars; the Signal Corps flags. Radio wouldn't be your branch?"

"Yes."

"Oh, wonderful! You're not to leave town until I snag you for a lecture."

"A lecture?" Paul said, not understanding.

"Yes—my classes. I'm head of the electrical engineering school at Southford; got three radio classes, and the boys would enjoy hearing from a Signal Corps officer. I know most information is restricted, but you could undoubtedly give them a good picture of equipment and conditions in the field. Most of these boys are either bound for the Signal Corps, or radio-location work with one of the armed services. It's a must—can't take no. We'll see you here at seven tomorrow evening, if not before." Paul had maneuvered himself into the hall. They shook hands. "Good night, Kimbrough. Really a pleasure to have met you."

"It was a pleasant surprise," Margaret said politely. "Do come tomorrow night, Paul."

"Thanks," Paul said in a flat voice. "Good night."

Chapter Four

HE left the house with an abrupt step, feeling choler rising within him, fused with a smattering of heat. Of all the alibis to pick, for a phony reason to explain an innocuous presence in Southford, he had to pick one with a husband! He had intended to use a romance as a cover for a special mission, but had had, unfortunately, to do exactly the reverse. The snow had weakened some, but the wind cut through him. He pulled his collar around his neck, and was about to set his course for Main Street when he saw the car at the curb. Snow-covered, it was not instantly familiar. The sight of Ellen Mitchell at the driver's seat, coolly smoking a cigarette, left no doubt, however. She hadn't even moved the car. She had just parked and waited.

"Very funny," he said, annoyed.

She pretended not to understand. "You left your bag in the car, Lieutenant. I was going to bring it in, and then I thought maybe it would be better if I waited until you came out." There was a glint in her eye, though her face was straight.

"You suspected I might be out?"

"I wasn't sure. After what you said about your charming personality—"

"Skip it," he said. He walked around the side and climbed into the front seat. He glared at her, his mouth undecided whether to play it hot or cold. The time-lag took all humor out of it. The would-be smile collapsed.

"Where away?" she asked.

"The hotel," he said politely. "It was thoughtful of you to remember my bag, and to wait for me. I can never repay you. Really!"

"Nick is very nice, isn't he?" she said blandly. "Very charming personality."

"Quite a joke," he said, playing his face stony. "You meet a nice girl and do the town with her, and she tells you you're just wond'ful, and for you to be sho' an' write to her when you go overseas, and to be sho' and come see her out yonder in Southfo'd if you ever wandered by, and when you do, she's some other guy's spouse. Very funny indeed! Why don't you laugh?"

"Maybe she felt she was doing her bit for defense by giving you her deathless beauty to think upon when you faced the enemy," Ellen said.

"That's very good," he said. "Ha-ha!"

Without taking her eyes off the road, Ellen said crisply: "Look here, Lieutenant! I never met you before this evening, and yet I've managed to become a taxi-driver for you, a mother-confessor, and now a whipping-post. Which is about enough. Because the torch you were carrying ran out of gasoline is no reason why I should become the object of your objections." She stopped the car under the canopy of the Robert Lee hotel on Main Street. "Here's your destination. As good a place as any to say good-by."

Paul Kimbrough jumped out of the car, amused at the success of his acting.

"Don't," she said as he turned to go, "forget your bag again, Lieutenant."

He turned back and got it from the car without a word. Then he said pleasantly: "Thanks for the lift to town, and for the taxi work."

"Think nothing of it," she said. "A special service to any and all members of the armed forces. Good night." She nodded curtly, and drove off up Main Street into the night.

Paul Kimbrough went into the hotel. He procured a room, took the elevator upstairs to it, and went in. He stripped down, and took a hot shower, and had climbed into pajamas when the telephone rang.

"Hello?"

"Ellen Mitchell. I thought you would be interested to know that when I delivered that transmitter to the police just now, they told me that Dad had reported from the hospital. The man we found in the Spa died just after eight o'clock tonight."

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said huskily. "Thanks for letting me know."

"Good night."

"Good night," he said.

It had been a long, confused day, and he was tired of it. Too, the death of Walter Ames sobered him considerably. He sat by the window for a while and stared down into Main Street through the snow, listening to canned music over his receiver from the broadcasting station on the roof of the hotel. When his depression hit its lowest ebb, he sighed, kicked off his slippers and climbed into bed.

The bed felt good—clean and crisp. He turned off the lamp beside it, and dropped off to sleep almost instantly. Later, he stirred, rolled heavily and awakened.

HE raised his head and listened. He was not a light sleeper; yet he knew some external impetus had roused him, some sound or movement. He groaned, and reached for the lamp on the night table and pushed the switch. It clicked noisily, but nothing happened.

"It won't work," a man said. "I took the bulb out."

"What the devil!" Paul said, startled, the hair rising up on the back of his neck, while his heart pounded hard. He sat erect.

"Don't get out of bed, Lieuténant," the man said. He had a sleek ingratiating voice as smooth as oil, and in a key low enough to be sinister. "The light doesn't work, but this does." There was a distinct sliding metallic sound, followed by a resonant click. "Know what I mean?"

"Yes," Paul said. He relaxed against his pillow. There was no mistaking that sound. Anyone who had ever pulled back the action and cocked the hammer of a heavy Colt .45 pistol could recognize it. "Yes, I know exactly what you mean."

After a moment, Paul Kimbrough could see his visitor, though not with definition. The room was very dark, but stray reflection from outside lights upon the snow lent the room enough relief to outline the gunman's form. He was not a big man, but he seemed heavy. He stood at the foot of the bed, a black outline. The intruder must have realized that he was being measured. As Paul leaned back against the headboard, feigning a nonchalance he did not feel, an electric torch flashed on. It struck him squarely between the eyes, blinding him, its perimeter covering his head and shoulders. He turned away from the brilliance, blinking. The room and the gunman disappeared in contrast, and he no longer saw anything but the cone of light.

The man said: "That's sensible, soldier. I trust you're not one of those strong silent men, Lieutenant?"

"You know my rank," Paul Kimbrough said evenly, "so you must be aware of my disposition."

"I want you to talk."

"I'm relatively garrulous," Paul said, turning from the light. "With my friends, that is. Your approach is wrong."

"That may be," the gunman said, unruffled. "But this gun isn't a stage prop. We may as well start candidly. It is up to you to satisfy me, Lieutenant. If you do not satisfy me on a number of points, I am going to have to kill you."

Paul blinked. "Right here?"

"On the spot."

"I don't believe it," Paul said. "It doesn't make sense. You're either crazy, or you've got the wrong guy. And you don't sound crazy. However lightly you take the gentle art of murder, you'd still have to have a reason."

THE gunman was silent for a moment. Then he sighed. "We're just wasting time. You would prefer to return to sleep, I to the Stygian cave where I was spawned, eh?" He laughed without humor.

A very poetic scoundrel, Paul thought, as he said simply: "What can I do for you?"

"The man you and Dr. Mitchell and the girl brought to the hospital: He is dead now, of course, but he should have been dead before anyone ever reached him. I want you to answer truthfully several rather important questions on the subject. I haven't the time or humor for bartering, or equivocation, or poor jokes. Don't try my patience, Kimbrough, because the ice is cracking under you."

Paul was silent. He began to figure the chances and approaches to jumping both the gun and the man.

"First," the gunman said, "who called the Doctor out there in the first place?"

"I don't know," Paul Kimbrough said. "Mitchell said that someone in town—a man—just rang him, told him a gun-shot case was waiting, and then hung up without identifying himself."

"It sounds plausible but for one thing. Who could have telephoned the Doctor?"

"Anybody who knew the situation."

"But nobody, let me assure you, Lieutenant, *knew* the situation, nobody but those who had personally handled it. There are no telephone lines to the Spa."

"That's what I said at the time," Paul said. But he did not explain Ellen's theory about the walkie-talkie they had found.

"Now then, did the wounded man talk?"

There was no point, Paul decided, in saying no, because the visitor expected a negative.

"Yes, he did. Of course, he was delirious, out of his head the whole time. He was dying fast in the car—you could tell by his breathing."

"What did he say, Kimbrough? I'm very interested."

"He said to tell some one. *'Tell him, tell him'* were his exact words." He paused to begin a lie. "Unfortunately, he didn't mention any names. He didn't seem to hear Dr. Mitchell's questions at all, just had something on his mind he wanted told. We never found out what it was."

"You're lying," said the gunman unaccusingly.

"No."

There was a long silence. The light in his face never wavered. Paul could feel the gunman thinking.

The man said finally: "How long do you expect to remain in town?"

"First train north in the morning."

"Precipitate tour, don't you think?"

"It's a sad story of unrequited love. Want to hear it?"

"By all means. I dote on such sagas."

Paul cleared his throat and said gayly, "I met her in New York. What a gal! A Southern accent, a classy chassis, and I left my heart at the stage-door canteen, just about as she thought I was going overseas. But I didn't go. Then—ten days' leave. I headed right here to see my gal Sal, only to find her legally hitched to a college prof. If I were that sort, I'd be contemplating suicide. I hope you're a discreet assassin."

The gunman was amused. "A very tragic affair. Has elements of truth. . . . Let's go back: I know that the dead man—his name was Ames—was working with an F.B.I. man here."

"Working on what?"

"Ingenious soul! Are you quite certain Ames didn't mention the name Daniel Webster?"

There was no point hiding the fact now. Paul realized this guy had seen the police report or had questioned Dr. Mitchell.

"Why—yes! But I thought it was delirium. The Senator from Massachusetts has been long dead. You mean there is a guy with such a historical moniker?"

MOMENTARY silence ensued, and Paul knew things had taken a turn for the worse. As he sat there, he slid one hand under his pillow, under which he had slipped his gun when he laid him down to sleep. The chances were not good that he would get it into the open without taking a bullet, but a chance was better than just sitting there. Something ominous told him the intruder was making up his mind.

"Kimbrough, you're damned clever," the gunman said. He took a long breath which was expressively raucous. "I came here to feel you out and give you the opportunity of getting out of town on the morrow with a whole hide. I'm afraid I was too magnanimous."

The telephone rang, shrilly, startling them both.

"Well?" Paul said, his voice shaking.

"Answer it, and tell me who it is."

"Shift the light over, then. I can't see it. I'm not used to the room. It's not exactly home."

The light left him and focused on the night-table, where the bulbless lamp, the telephone handset and a small alarm-clock all sat communally.

Paul held his left hand under the pillow on the revolver there, and reached out with his right. He skipped the hand-set and grabbed the alarm-clock. In the same sweeping motion, he underhanded it straight into the light, then rolled bodily out of bed on the far side, and as soon as he hit the floor, he fired twice into the darkness at the foot of the bed.

No gunfire answered him. He scrambled around on the floor frantically until his head was down by the foot of the bed, his stomach hard against the floor. At this point the door opened, the hall illumination streamed in, and he saw the man duck into the hall and slam the door.

The flashlight lay on the rug, still burning.

Paul scrambled to his feet and ran to the door. He stayed to one side of it and tried the knob. The knob rattled, but the door was locked. Instantly, a shot cracked outside, and a long splinter leaped out of the door into the air, raised by the bullet which came through. After that, the silence settled down again.

"Damn!" Paul thought. "All I needed was a look at him. One good look!"

He waited a moment more, tried the knob again. As before, the door was locked, very simply, with his own key. It had been on the inside. Now it was missing.

The telephone had stopped ringing. He wondered vaguely to whom he owed his life. He picked up the flashlight and used it to reach the telephone. "Hello!"

"Yes, Lieutenant?"

"There was a call for me—"

"The party rang off, sir."

"All right. Then get this, and get it fast! I was just—molested in my room by an armed man. He's on the way down. Short and stocky. Don't try to stop him—you may get hurt. Take a good look at him when he passes. He'll probably use the staircase."

"Very well, sir," the clerk said.

"Then come up and unlock my door. He locked me in."

"Yes sir."

Paul hung up. He climbed into bed and sat there with his knees raised against his chest, and he waited. The cold dread in him was seeping out, but he did not feel empty. Intense resentment and anger began to bubble.

After a while he heard the key in his latch click noisily. He had, by then, replaced the bulb in his lamp with one from his bathroom. The door opened, and the clerk peered in, wide-eyed behind his spectacles. He was a definite 4-F character, tall, extremely thin, pallid, and myopic. "Sir?"

"Right here," Paul Kimbrough said. "Did you see him?"

"Sorry, sir," said the clerk. "No one came down at all. I waited for a few minutes, but no one passed, and no one used the elevator."

"Did you use the elevator just now?"

"Yes. John brought me up. John is the elevator-boy."

"And no one is in the lobby at the moment?"

"Well, no sir. I had to come unlock your door—"

"Never mind," Paul said, disgusted. The clerk had played it exactly the way the gunman had stage-directed. With no one in the lobby, the man had only to walk out at dead slow in perfect safety.

"Shall I call the police, sir?" the clerk asked, worried.

"Never mind," Paul replied. "Nothing was stolen. Forget it. Just get me another bulb for my bathroom."

"I'll have it sent up. Terribly sorry it happened, Lieutenant. Very unusual. In many years, we've never—"

"I know," Paul Kimbrough said. "An unhappy circumstance. I won't write nasty letters to the manager. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Chapter Five

SLEEP was unsatisfactory thereafter, a mere ritual broken by frustrated dreams. Paul worried. He had hoped to get to first base without becoming conspicuous, but his feet had barely cooled after the evening abroad when he had been tapped for election to the same fraternity that Walt Ames had joined. . . .

No, nothing had percolated correctly. Instead of keeping the rendezvous at the Spa with him, Walt Ames had been shot to death. Instead of picking a gay young girl, footloose and fancy free, as an alibi for a Southford stopover, Paul had managed to hook a would-be adventuress, kissing the boys good-by while her ball and chain punched the clock at Southford College. Instead of remaining inconspicuous, he had drawn the spider to him with all the dexterity of a fly!

Next morning, while Kimbrough was pecking at breakfast in the coffee-shoppe downstairs he was joined by a plump policeman in brass-buttoned blue coat, who sat beside him without invitation, and said, "Howdy," politely enough.

"Likewise," Paul Kimbrough said.

"You're Lieutenant Kimbrough."

"Are you telling or asking?"

"Telling," said the cop. "I'm Lance Frankel, chief of police here. It's about the murder last night. Doc Mitchell gave me all the details. . . . I was wondering how long you planned to stay with us here in town?"

"Until tonight. I had planned to stay longer, but something came up to change my plans."

Chief Frankel chewed on a lot of lower lip. "Afraid something's going to change 'em again. I'll have to ask you to stay over here forty-eight hours at least, until I get my teeth into this thing. You're a material witness in the case."

"Oh, fine!" thought Paul. "A gunman promises a nice quiet burial if you don't get out, and a chief of police promises a nice quiet calaboose if you do!"

"You see," said Chief Frankel, "I aint satisfied, personally, that you arriving at the Spa at just that time was pure coincidence." He peered at Paul to see what effect his words had. They did nothing.

Paul said: "On the other hand, I had no physical control whatsoever over the schedules of the C. & O. You must know very well that that was the same old train from Washington, arriving at Fox Hill at the same old time."

"I know that," said Chief Frankel. "And I know you were on it, too. I checked with the Washington ticket office on it. But I still think it was funny, don't you?"

"How?"

"Well, here was a guy from the F.C.C., Ames. One of those radio detectives they send out to locate subversive elements, as the man says. From what I gather, an F.C.C. field operative is supposed to locate illegal radio stations —right?"

"Yes."

"And on the spot, a little transmitter is found, a little walkie-talkie gadget like they make in Signal Corps labs—right?"

"Yes," Paul said. "But—"

"And on top of that, an officer of the Signal Corps just happens to wander in at the same time, looking for a lift to town."

"The curse of coincidence!" Paul Kimbrough said, vaguely bothered. Chief Frankel should have been a hick. It was a hick town; he had a hick look, with that fine belly, and he should have had hick theories.

"Did you know Walter Ames before you saw him wounded in the Spa?" Chief Frankel asked.

Paul regarded the big face of his adversary with an innocent expression. Frankel was not unfriendly, but his eyes were definitely cynical. "No."

"You'd never heard of him?"

"That's right."

"Never even had a telegram?"

Bingo! Paul refused a reply and just stared coolly at the chief of police to see if the guy would elucidate further.

Chief Frankel smiled. "Startled you, eh?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, *Philo,*" Paul said.

"All right. We may as well start clean: I know dang well *you* didn't kill Ames. You were working with him, or going to. I got a lot of friends in this town who keep their eyes and ears open. These are war times, and I like to check any strangers in town. I check other ways, too. Sarah Hastings, my niece, works over at Western Union. When I got suspicious of your arriving so neatly, I asked her about telegrams from this Ames. He sent you one early yesterday morning telling you he would meet you at the Spa after the twelve o'clock Washington train got in. The day before that, he sent you one asking you to telephone him. There's no sense denying it."

Kimbrough was silent a moment. Then he said: "I won't deny it. On the other hand, I don't think you ought to advertise it, either. It happens to be a matter of the utmost importance, and your constabulary station notwithstanding, it happens not to be your business."

"Murder is my business," said Chief Frankel. "To solve a murder, I got to know some things."

"This murder is trivial beside other issues," said Paul Kimbrough. "If you expect me to explain what Ames was doing here, and what I am doing here, it's no go. If you want to get rough about it, we can put through to the Federal Bureau of Investigation for my authority in the matter. Or, for that matter, the Chief Signal Officer in Washington. It's official business, and it's military."

Chief Frankel shrugged. "And none of my business."

"I'm afraid that's right, though rude."

"All right." The Chief sighed. "We haven't had a killing in this town in four years. I've got to work on the case. What I find out, I'll find alone, then."

"What you find out, Chief, kindly keep under your hair."

"Oh, sure," Chief Frankel replied shrewdly. "I'm not as dumb as I look. It's just a queer situation."

"Would you tell me one thing?" Kimbrough asked.

"Maybe."

"Did you find Walt's car?"

"Uh-huh. It was parked out behind the Spa in front of the stables."

Paul took a long breath. "Intact?"

"Not exactly. It was burning when me and my men arrived. Everything in it had been removed before the fire started. I don't know how it looked before, but obviously there was a lot of radio gear in that car, detecting devices and what not, eh? There wasn't a hair or hide of 'em left, and the car was burned out before we could do anything."

"A nice clean job of it," Paul murmured.

"Uh-huh." Chief Frankel rose lazily. "Glad to have met you, Lieutenant. I hope we both make out."

"Thanks," Kimbrough said. "Good luck."

"Oh, you haven't seen the last of me," Frankel remarked cheerfully. "Not by a danged sight." He smiled at Paul's smile. "Funny to hear a man cuss with a word like *dang*? I used to be a pretty good cusser; but Ethel, my wife, gave me—Hades for it, so I changed over to *gol-darn* and *danged* and other *ersatz* substitutes. A man has to cuss somehow, eh? Good morning." He ambled out with a fluid slow motion, giving the impression of weight and serenity.

WHEN Kimbrough had finished his breakfast, he went upstairs. The elevator-boy took him to the fifth floor, and when he went down the hall, he found Margaret Rigby standing in front of his door, her eyes big and wary against her white face. "I thought you'd *never* come!" she breathed.

"Well, well!" Paul said, eying her. "I wasn't expecting you. You should have let me know you were coming. Such a clandestine approach requires etchings. I forgot to bring mine South with me."

"Open your door quickly," she said, looking down the hall worriedly. "I don't want anyone to see me here. Oh, Paul, why on earth did you come?"

He opened the door, and they went in. He locked the door. She flounced swiftly into a chair, relieved. The least she could have done was to act perturbed at the sound of the key. Obviously, she did not regard him as a genuine wolf. She was more afraid of the outside.

"Why did you come? I was never so shocked—"

"Welcome to Southford, Kimbrough, old boy!"

"Oh," she said softly, tilting her head as she showed sympathy, "I never meant to hurt your feelings, darling. Not a bit! I'm very fond of you, really. But I never *expected* you. I thought—"

He said: "You don't owe me an explanation. You thought I had gone overseas. The week in New York was just you doing your bit for the war effort, kissing a boy good-by, eh? Telling me you were a dyed-in-the-wool wife then would have spoiled the whole lovely frolic. Don't

blame you. I had a swell time—it was nice knowing you. . . . Do you follow me?"

"Yes," she said. She looked pleased.

"I'm not, personally," he said, "one to cast a shadow on the hearth of any husband, being inimical to affairs of honor in the good old Southern way."

She rose and moved to him. The fragrance of her perfume reached him. "I'm sorry I hurt you so much. It was wrong to let you fall in love with me, and then—do this to you. I should have told you the truth. But it was so gay." Her voice trailed off. She touched his cheek with her hand. "You'll have to leave Southford, Paul. You really must, just as soon as possible."

He was amused with her theatrics, worrying about his completely unbroken heart. "Why?"

"Nick suspects us," Margaret said hollowly. "I know he does. I don't think he believed that special-mission business at *all*. It sounded so terribly fishy, Paul. He's been too polite ever since you came last night. Please don't come for dinner. I don't mean to be rude, but I'd hate to have a scandal here."

From the look in her eyes, nothing would have been more exciting to her. The glow there was the kind that would have reveled in the sight of pistols at dawn under the sycamores. She needed a lesson, but he didn't have the time to spare for it.

"Of course, then," he said, "I wouldn't come to dinner. I'm sorry Mr. Rigby has green in his eye. He was a nice guy. He was such a nice guy that I don't quite see you tripping the light fantastic on the sidewalks of New York with me."

She smiled warmly at him. "It was very charming, Paul."

"Oh, yes. My charming personality."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"No."

The telephone rang. He picked up the hand-set and said hello. A thin calm voice said: "Kimbrough?"

"Speaking."

"This is the Senator from Massachusetts. Can you go right down to the lobby to the pay telephone?"

"I can."

"Do so. This land line may be tapped. Don't think so, but it may. I'll give you three minutes; then I'll call you there."

"Right, Senator."

They both hung up. Paul swept Margaret Rigby to the door and unlocked it. "On your way, angel-face," he said grandly. "From this moment on, I move out of your life. I shall always regret that I found you wed, and every now and then I'll send up a burnt offering of Courvoisier in your memory."

"But Paul—" she said reluctantly.

"Sorry—I'm in a rush. Good-by!"

"But if Nick sees you—he wanted you to talk to that radio class—you won't say anything—"

"About us? Nothing to say. I'll be discreet. Good-by, Margaret. You take the elevator—I'll take the stairs." He left her in the hall, and skipped down the staircase, holding his left hand on the butt of his gun as he whistled, *"You take the high road and I'll take the low road."*

In the lobby he climbed into the pay booth and sat down on the edge of the wooden seat, and had barely arranged himself when the phone rang.

"Kimbrough speaking, Senator. Okay."

"Sure?"

"Wait a second." Paul peered out. No one was hanging around the booth. He went back. "Sure."

"How is the situation with you?"

"Not so good. Last night, a gunman warned me to leave town. Today the police warned me not to do so."

"You had better," said the Senator from Massachusetts, "come and see me. You are probably being followed, so use care. Walk up Main Street to the little cemetery where the statue of Stonewall Jackson stands, and I'll pick you up in my car coming by."

"They may spot your plates," said Paul.

"No. I've put Virginia plates over the District of Columbia ones, and the car is a black Ford. Safe enough. Ten minutes?"

"Okay."

Kimbrough hung up. He stepped out of the booth, lighted a cigarette with extravagant nonchalance, then strolled out onto Main Street. The air was thin and sharp, the snow deep, but packed down hard by through traffic.

He cut north, up toward the old Presbyterian Church with its great white columns, until he reached the little cemetery at the top of the hill. The snow had covered the stones, but the statue of Jackson, head bared, hand on sword, plainly marked the entrance, and on the face of the bronze plaque at the statue's base was the embossed legend: *"Here lie the gallant men who followed Lee."*

Chapter Six

A BLACK sedan skidded in toward the curb. Paul stepped into it, sat down, and slammed the door. The car moved off.

Paul smiled warmly and extended his hand. "Daniel Webster, I presume?"

"Howdy," Daniel Webster said, and shook hands with a grip that would have broken a bottle. Which was a surprise to Paul, for Webster was a mild-looking little man, without any aspect of a special agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He had the anonymous look of a fourth vice-president. He wore an uninspired brown suit, pale brown shoes, a rounded tipped starched collar with a tightly knotted rainbow-hued silk tie. His brown felt hat was worn without dash and looked too big for him. He had sandy brows, and a thin face, but his eyes were gray, inscrutable; his mouth was as shrewd as a New England peddler's.

"We'll talk in a minute," he said quietly. "Let's ride out toward Fairfield to check any shadow they put on us."

"As you say."

They drove. It soon became obvious, as the white highway stretched behind them emptily, that no surveillance or pursuit was in progress. Daniel Webster pulled over to the side of the road, avoiding deep snow, and stopped. He left the engine running, and unbuttoned his overcoat so that the edge of a shoulder holster showed plainly, the big butt of a Colt .38 poking out.

He said briefly: "Who's first—you or me?"

"You go first," said Kimbrough.

"Okay. Credentials."

Paul produced his Signal Corps credentials, a small brown folder encased in celluloid. Webster scanned them briefly and returned them. He nodded curtly. "The Spa?"

"When I got there, intending to meet Walt Ames as he had suggested in his wire," Paul said, putting his credentials away, "he had already been shot. Dr. Mitchell and his daughter Ellen were on the spot. The Doctor said someone had called him out there."

"I called him out," said Daniel Webster.

"How did you know he'd been—"

"He told me. Walkie-talkie. I had one. He had one."

"Where were you at the time?" Paul asked.

"Not far from the Spa, but on the Deep Caverns road. Deep Caverns are to the south, on the old pike toward Chanley Forge. Nobody uses the old road much any more."

Paul Kimbrough frowned. "What the devil are the Deep Caverns?"

"Caves in the earth. The State is studded with them. These particular ones are located under a hill west of Southford. The geology classes at the college explore them

somewhat every year, but they're endless, I guess. Like those commercially exploited Endless Caverns up near New Market. Stalactites and stalagmites, and abysses and chasms. Dangerous as hell. They go down into the earth five miles at least. Wet, cold, treacherous. . . . Do you know what the score is, Lieutenant?"

"Not completely," said Paul. . . . "Your credentials, please."

These were in order.

"Okay," Paul said. "I'm here by request of the Chief Signal Officer. I suppose you know all this."

"Just keep talking," Daniel Webster said, lighting a cigarette. "I seldom tell whether I know anything or not. That keeps me smarter than the next guy."

"A Signal Corps truck was making delivery of a standard continuous-wave transmitter to the Army camp at Stotesburg, Camp Earle. Neither the truck, the transmitter nor the driver has been seen or heard of since. This was on the second, about three weeks ago."

"That," Daniel Webster said, blowing out smoke without taking the cigarette from his mouth, "I know."

"Well, I didn't. They took me out of Intelligence at Monmouth, and sent me to Washington, where they told me I was to assist down here. The F.C.C. field agents have been spread so thin, keeping their eyes on possible enemy radio transmitters, that they were short-handed. That's the dope; an F.B.I. man, and an F.C.C. man in Southford. Me to join them—locate the missing No. 365, help them on the job."

"They didn't tell you anything?" Daniel Webster said.

"I gathered. So what?"

"The S.C. truck is in the North River. At least, Ames and I thought so. The transmitter it carried is in enemy hands. That we know. Your Signal Corps unit, Kimbrough, has already been on the air."

Paul Kimbrough waited without comment.

"It's already reported to D.N.K., Berlin. The information dispatched was important—to say the least."

"What has happened, in sequence?" Paul asked. "I want to straighten it out in my mind."

"When your S.C. truck and transmitter were heisted, Washington sent me down for a gander," said Daniel Webster. "Five days later, Walter Ames showed up in his special car, and I had word that I was to work with him. Seems some gal in town had monitored a radio transmission in the dead of night which she said was extremely suspicious, and she got in touch with the Federal Communications Commission."

"Know who she was?" Paul Kimbrough asked.

Daniel Webster blinked like a wise old owl. "Sure. Your friend Ellen Mitchell."

"Ellen!" Paul exclaimed. "But the stolen transmitter couldn't be modulated by microphone. It was only good for code transmissions with a key."

"So she can read code," said Webster. "She happens to be assistant chief engineer at the local radio station."

Paul was flabbergasted. "You mean—a girl—"

"Girls are doing lots of things these days."

"But to engineer a radio station—she must have studied—"

"She must have," said Daniel Webster, faintly amused. "She happened to know her stuff. Her tip was right. Ames monitored the same station the first night he was down here. It went on the air at fifteen past midnight, calling D.N.K., Berlin. D.N.K. gave a green light, and this Nazi in Virginia gave his squirter the business. He had plenty of dope—military, production, naval. All good stuff. Espionage as she should be practiced, you know. . . . Anyway, the first night Walt put a radio direction-finder on the signal from two points, and then we drew bearings from those points. The bearings crossed at or near the old Spa."

"So?" said Paul Kimbrough.

"We laid low, waited for the next transmission to get a sharper bearing. Two nights later, the station—it called itself K.N.D.—a reversal of the Jerry in Berlin, went on the air again. This time Walt Ames got a three-way bearing on it with the gear in his car; but when we mapped it, it was just to the east of the Spa, about quarter of a mile."

Paul Kimbrough stared off remotely. "Why was that?"

"You," replied Daniel Webster, "will have to answer that one. Walt Ames never lived to. We raided the Spa. When I say raid, I don't mean anything spectacular. We just walked in one evening when the signal was on the air, and we searched the old place, and found a transmitter. It was all warmed up, but no one was there. We seized the gear, impounded it. But we didn't seize the bird who had been operating it."

"But if you seized it—"

"I'm not finished. It gets wackier. Next morning Walt Ames reported the station eliminated, to his boss in Washington. The chief said he was nuts—they had logged the station K.N.D. from one A.M. on, which is to say, from the time we left the Spa on the same night."

Paul Kimbrough took a breath. "A plant! You seized a dummy. The real job wasn't on the spot. That should have been obvious. Was the dummy a Signal Corps transmitter?"

"No. It was a little hundred-watt job. Walt Ames said it was a nice rig."

"But the missing Signal Corps rig," said Paul, "is a nicer rig, and you didn't find that. That one is still able to squirt secret information from here to Berlin straight from our doorstep."

DANIEL WEBSTER shrugged, and tossed his cigarette out the window. His gray eyes flicked up into the rear-vision mirror now and then.

"About last night—what happened?" Paul asked.

"Just about what you know. Ames figured to meet you on the Fox Hill road at the Spa, because he and I wanted to check it again. That second bearing—remember—didn't focus right on the Spa, but to the south of it. So I came in from the old road to the west, and he came from the Spa. We both had the little walkie-talkies to converse with each other. He got it, and I didn't, and you walked in on the end."

Paul Kimbrough thought it over, looking stony and impressed. "He didn't see who—"

"He never said so. I heard the shots over the walkie-talkie and then he just gasped *'I'm shot, Dan, I'm shot.'* I was figuring on asking you about any other dope he may have passed. Matter of fact, I was counting on it."

"He mentioned your name," Paul Kimbrough said. "I passed it off as delirium so that Dr. Mitchell would forget it. That was when he came to, for a few seconds in the car. He said for me to tell you."

"Tell me what?"

"He'd just said *'Winezel.'* That's all he could give."

Daniel Webster wet his lips. "Winezel? There's no Winezel in this set-up. There are lots of people and no names. But even so, there's no Winezel."

"I don't think he finished," Paul said. "But what the devil—it's lost now! What's the program?"

Daniel Webster shrugged. "That's up to you, youngster. Your job is to locate the station and the gear. My job is to arrest the operators. I don't know much about radio, and in this particular set-up, you have to know radio to catch your men. There are no other leads. From here on, the seniority passes to you."

"All right," Paul Kimbrough said. "I'll want to think about it a little."

"Thinking is always good," Daniel Webster nodded. "Action is nine-tenths thinking, and one-tenth movement. We'd better get back. My telephone number is 86, but for God's sake, be careful where and when you call me. I'm an

old geezer with a lung ailment taking a long rest at this nice altitude. Nobody in this set-up knows that I'm in, except you."

"You're wrong. The gunman knows your name."

"So?"

"But not you."

"Very good."

"Ellen Mitchell?"

"She didn't know anything except that Walt Ames had arrived in response to her tip. She seems like a nice kid, anyhow."

Paul smiled wryly. "She can be trusted, you mean?"

"Personally, I don't trust anybody. Not even you. I've been around in this racket for a long time, and never even been creased. If you see what I mean."

Daniel Webster started the car, turned it and rolled them back toward Southford. They went a few miles in silence before he murmured: "Keep me posted on what you figure to do, son."

"All right," Paul said. "I keep thinking of those caves. Deep Caverns! I think I'll have a look at them. Those caves would be a perfect spot for an enemy radio station. It might take you forever to find a transmitter down in uncharted limestone grottos."

Daniel Webster didn't even blink. "You'll have to make it sooner than forever," he remarked evenly. "Because you aren't going to last that long, unless you're a lot smarter than you look. Don't get me wrong, Lieutenant. I like you, and I like working with you. I like a new approach. But remember, in this little game, there's a war involved, and nobody is going to play at it for the sport. You understand? There is a bullet with your name on it right now, and whether or not it is delivered is going to depend on one thing."

"How good I am?"

"Worse than that," Daniel Webster said ominously. "How good you are doesn't matter. Whether or not it's delivered is going to depend only on how good the enemy agent's aim is, once you stay past the deadline you were given." He cleared his throat and glanced at Paul with a faint hard smile. "You follow me?"

"Oh, but clearly."

"Good," Daniel Webster said. "We're not alone. Don't look now, but a black coupe picked us up when we passed Wolf Cross, back there a hundred yards or so."

Chapter Seven

FOR a minute or two they drove in silence, the snow crunching dry under the pressure of their tires. Then Paul Kimbrough, with a long cold look into the rear-vision mirror, said: "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," Daniel Webster said. "It's your show."

Paul considered this. He watched the car in the mirror. It was just a small dark sedan, and there was only one person in it. It hung far enough behind so that the driver could not be identified.

"Personally," Paul Kimbrough said, "I'm sick of all this hocus-pocus."

"What hocus-pocus there's been," replied the Senator, "has been purely for the enjoyment of good health. I'll bet Ames would have liked more hocus-pocus instead of a bullet in the belly."

"With less, he might still be alive," Paul Kimbrough said sharply. "Hell, I'm a soldier, not a sluefoot. I don't know anything about surveillance and pussyfooting. All I know is I was sent down here to recover a stolen transmitter. The fact that the job has broadened into uncovering an enemy radio station and nailing the rats behind the key doesn't change anything. The fact that we're tailed proves one thing: They know who you are and they know who I am, so what the hell! Why tiptoe?"

"I said it was your show, son."

"All right," said Paul Kimbrough. "It's my show. There's a sharp curve coming ahead. When you pull around it, brake this jalopy and skid her on her beam ends and make a road block. Then pile out and get your gun in your hand. The guy behind us used his head. We weren't tailed out of town, but we were observed to leave northward. Easy enough to follow out, find a nice spot, wait, and then pick us up on the way back. Which is what has happened."

"For what purpose?" Daniel Webster asked.

"To find out who you are and where you live, and what I have to do with you. . . . Here's the curve. Brake her. Hard!"

Daniel Webster scouted the highway once for other cars, but there were none except that lone sedan. Then he slowed, and braked the car, and she skidded broadside across the road. Kimbrough leaped out of the car, pulling the revolver from the holster under his coat, as the other car rounded the curve, saw the situation, and started applying brakes. The F.B.I. man did not move as rapidly, nor did he pull a gun. He stepped off to the side of the road on the inside of the curve and waited patiently.

The other car just made it. It skidded crazily, then slid off the road and jerked to a halt. Daniel Webster took one look at the driver, then got back in his own car, backed it, and parked it in a more normal fashion on the side of the pike, while Kimbrough ran to the other car. When he got there, his jaw dropped.

"Margaret!" he gasped.

Margaret Rigby sat behind the wheel, looking dazed and a little frightened. "Well, I never!" she exploded in a moment. "What a terrible thing to do, leaving a car across a road like that!"

Paul Kimbrough realized he was still holding a gun in his hand. Embarrassed, he put it away hurriedly. She stared at it, her eyes expressively wide. "Why, Paul," she said, "were you going to shoot *me*?"

"I thought you were someone else," he said. He glanced quickly at the car, thinking the machine which had followed them had turned off, or stopped somewhere beyond the curve, but it was the same vehicle. "What were you doing, following us?" he said suddenly.

Margaret glanced over at Daniel Webster, without replying. He was leaning nonchalantly against the rear of his own car, smoking a cigarette and studying the sky.

"You were following us," Paul Kimbrough said.

"Of course I was," she said. "I've got to see you. I saw you going down Main when you were leaving town. I was on my way to see you. I wanted to ask you some questions, and I wanted to tell you something I found out. If you really came all the way down here just to see me because of our little escapade in New York, then I've been very foolish, and I've taken some unnecessary risks. But if you're here for what I think you're here for—"

"Let's presume that you weren't exactly the light of my life," Paul Kimbrough said. "Let's presume I had another reason for hallowing Southford with my presence."

"I thought so," she said. "And I was feeling so badly for having led you astray." Her face fell.

"Never mind that," Paul Kimbrough said.

"I can't tell you anything with him standing over there watching," she said, nodding at the Senator.

"Okay. I'll go back in your buggy." He went over to Daniel Webster. "She'll take me back, Senator."

"Figured so," Daniel Webster answered with a cynical smile.

"You don't have to look like an archdeacon. It's not what you think."

Daniel Webster shrugged, unimpressed. "See you," he said. "Be careful." He drove off.

Paul got into Margaret Rigby's car, and she drove off after Webster, but more slowly. The leading car soon outdistanced them.

"We're quite alone," Paul said.

"Yes," she said soberly. She glanced at him with a trace of coquetry. "It's in my bag."

"What?"

"The thingumajig," she said. "Some kind of radio tube. You look at it first, Paul."

SHE pushed her purse toward him. Paul accepted it and opened it. It was filled, like any feminine purse, with everything but a pair of snowshoes. He pulled out the tube.

It was a big tube. It stood eight inches high and two inches broad, an RCA-805 transmitting triode. Paul cradled it in his hands carefully, treating it with the awe and caution of a radioman. The hard glass bulb had been stamped—in bright orange—with a small square, in the center of which were the letters *S.C.*

"Where did you find this?" he asked, his voice husky.

"Then it does mean something?" she asked, looking frightened. "I thought when I saw that S.C. that it might mean *Signal Corps.*"

"It does," Paul said. "This tube was tested at a factory by a Signal Corps inspector, and stamped with approval before it was shipped out into the field *with* a transmitter, similarly stamped and approved."

She puzzled at him. "But is that why you're down here?" she asked. "I think it was rather mean of you to play the frustrated young thing on leave. For a while I believed it. I almost wanted to believe it, Nick's been such a beast." She touched his hand. "You were very sweet in New York, Paul."

"Where did you get this thing?" he said bluntly.

"At my home. In the cellar where Nick has his workroom. It was with his things. He has the cellar full of radio gear. Before the war, he had an amateur station, and he used to build all sorts of odd gadgets and oscillators and things. . . . Now, teaching radio theory at Southford College, he tinkers down there building things he uses in class to demonstrate things to the students."

"How did you happen to find this particular tube?" Paul asked. "Were there any others like this one?"

"No, there weren't. Is that one any good? The top gadget seemed all loose."

The top gadget happened to be the plate voltage cap, which had, through carelessness, been torn loose from its mount on the glass, thereby effectively ruining the tube by opening its vacuum to air.

"It's shot," Paul said. "But I want to know how you happened—"

"Well, I saw it. The orange stamp on the glass. I'd never seen anything like that before. *S.C.* And you were on my mind. In fact, I was worried because Nick had asked so many questions about you. He—well, he got rather ugly about it."

"Ugly?"

"Jealous at first, and then it seemed like more than jealousy. He seemed almost afraid. He hurt me." She glanced at him for sympathy. "My arm."

"I don't see—"

"Then the oil burner didn't work when I turned up the thermostat this morning."

"After you left me?"

"No, before I saw you at the hotel. The relay or something always sticks. I usually go down and bang it, and it shuts, and the burner works. When I went down, I saw this tube then, but I didn't pay much attention to it. Then when you rushed me out of the hotel after I'd asked you not to come to dinner, I got suspicious that you had never come down to fall in love with me at all. I remembered the S.C. *Signal Corps!* Down into the cellar I went. Got the tube, started back for you, and saw you and that funny little man driving out of town. I couldn't keep up with you. So I waited for you to come back."

"You had a great deal of faith in my coming back."

"Good heavens," she said, throwing her hand to her mouth, "I never thought you might be leaving for good!" Her voice warmed. "I'm glad you didn't, Paul."

"Thanks," he said, disturbed. They had come down to the river by Southford and were rattling across the unfrozen tympani of the old planking at the bridge. "Margaret, why do you think I came down here?"

"I don't know," she said. "But it's Signal Corps business, isn't it?"

"You're the damnedest woman I ever met!" he said suddenly, stirring and facing her angrily. "Tell me this, then: Where do you think your husband got this tube? What is he doing with it?"

"I don't know," she said evenly.

"Did it ever occur to you that he might have got it illegally?"

"It did."

"I'll tell you something else, then: A Signal Corps transmitter was stolen not far from this town. Stolen on the highway in the dead of night, the driver of the truck killed, the truck destroyed. The number you see stamped on the tube under the S.C. seal of approval belongs to a certain inspector. The inspector was on duty at a plant I shall not name. That means this tube came from that plant, and was in the spare-parts crate along with the transmitter which was stolen. By God, that ought to make sense to you. This tube is out of a rig stolen from the United States Army by someone who has managed to kill two men in the doing. And you find it in your husband's cellar. Don't you realize what you're doing? What you've done? Do you think your husband is capable of murder and treachery?"

"My husband," she said, her face white, "is capable of anything." Her lips were bloodless. She pulled the car over to the curb on the rise of hill below the hotel. "You'd better get out here, Paul. He has so many ways of finding things out."

"I'm not finished," he said.

She shrugged. "I am."

"Not quite. Does he leave you at night?"

"Often, yes."

"Where does he go?"

"I don't know. He says he goes to the college to set up radio experiments for the next day."

"You don't believe that, obviously."

She sighed heavily: "Why would he get covered with red clay, tinkering in a college laboratory at night?"

Paul stared at her without concentration. "Look here, my friend: a favor! Will you telephone me the very next night he goes afield to tinker?"

"I don't know," she said. There was anxiety in her face. "If he ever found out, he might—" She stopped. "All right."

"Good-by," Paul said. "Thanks for the buggy ride." He slid the tube into his coat pocket, stepped from the car and started walking briskly up Main Street. He didn't look at her again as she drove past him on her way. She'd given him the cold jeebies. Besides, Ellen Mitchell was on his mind.

HE trudged up the hill, with the transmitting tube in his pocket banging his leg all the way. When he reached the hotel, he took the elevator to the top floor, where Radio WDHA existed, lock, stock and barrel. He had seen greater and more awe-inspiring networks in his day, but it was a tight little affair. In the reception-room, a sweet young thing with an accent you had to wipe off your chest, smiled disarmingly at him and said: "May Ah help yo', suh?"

He forgot to be flippant. "Ellen Mitchell."

Aware that he was in no mood for conquest, the receptionist picked up her hand-set. "Your name?"

"Kimbrough—Lieutenant Kimbrough."

"Lieutenant Kimbrough to see you, Miss Mitchell. . . . Go right through that door, Lieutenant. Miss Mitchell will see you."

THE door was *Sesame* to the studios and the engineering department where he found Ellen Mitchell at her desk. Behind her was a bank of test equipment and some gear she had been examining. She had a very fine National HRO receiver on her desk for her own use. She rose to meet him, looking very neat in a pair of slacks topped by a soft white sweater. The slacks fitted her the way most other women dream of fitting slacks and seldom do. She smiled.

"I called you late last night," she said. "Then I rang off. It *was* rather late, and when you didn't answer right away, I assumed you were asleep and would cut my pretty throat for annoying you. Besides, I—well, I may have been premature."

"Your call," he said fervently, "was a Godsend. I wondered who it was saved my life."

"What are you talking about?"

"More anon. . . . Ellen, I want your help."

"In what respect?"

"Let's not kid each other. You knew who Walt Ames was, and you knew why he was here. In fact, you've been keeping back a lot of important information—for instance, that you engineer a radio station instead of knitting socks for the boys in Tunisia."

"I knit pretty well," she said. "But with a war on, you're likely to find a girl anywhere. My brother chiefed this broadscattering system before he wound up on a South Pacific island, and he had taught me enough to get me a first-class commercial and his job when he left. Radio talent hereabouts is scarce, and imports for the post were rare."

"Radio talent hereabouts—and I don't mean crooning—is more than you'd think," Paul Kimbrough said soberly. "I think the time has come to stop sparring. I'm taking over Walter Ames' job, and I'd like to clean it up as quickly as possible."

"I knew it," she said quietly.

"Is that why you telephoned last night?"

"Yes. . . . KND, which is the enemy station out somewhere on the Fox Hill road, was on the air last night. I monitored them on the receiver here and copied them. It was all coded as usual. I was going to tell you, and then—" She shrugged. "I wasn't sure."

"Now you can be," he said. "I want a small receiver tuned to the station's frequency, and a radio direction-finding loop for an antenna. Can you fix me up? All of Walt's gear was destroyed or stolen."

Ellen nodded, her eyes bright. "I can fix you up."

"Soon?"

"By tonight. They won't go on the air before nightfall, because they're only on two thousand kilocycles, and they need the long-distance skip after dark to reach Berlin."

"Fine," Paul said. He rose. "Please lunch with me."

Ellen measured him with a gentle smile. "You'll go easy with the charming personality, Lieutenant?"

Kimbrough winced.

"That's all I wanted to know," she said. "You do have a conscience. I'd love to lunch with you."

There was a scratching at the door as she rose, and then the door opened, and a shaggy red setter pushed in, beating a tattoo against all wooden surfaces with its long tail. She wet Kimbrough thoroughly with a bright tongue and snow-dampened paws, and then she sat down lazily at Ellen's command.

"For the love of Pete!" Paul said, surprised.

"Her name is Cindy, not Pete," Ellen said. "She's my dog."

"Do I have to invite her to lunch too?"

"Not exactly. Harry—the porter—just let her out for a while, downstairs. She'll wait here until I get back."

They bribed the setter with soft words, then left the dog in the office. They took the elevator down to the lobby and the coffee-shoppe, secured a table and ordered.

"I have a lot of nice things I'd like to tell you about yourself," Paul said directly, meeting her eyes across the table. "But baying like a wolf doesn't have a high priority right now. . . . What do you know about Margaret and Nicholas Rigby?"

Ellen Mitchell frowned, and stared at the white tablecloth. "That's a broad question," she said. She picked up her spoon and began to doodle on the tablecloth with it.

"All right," Paul said. "How long have you known them?"

"Ever since they came to Southford. About eight months ago. Margaret was an actress before she married. She did quite a bit of work for WDHA on little things we dreamed up, when we had our own writers. She was excellent too—she's a very good actress."

"And Nick Rigby?"

"He teaches radio engineering at the college. . . . Can't we talk about something else? Let's talk about us."

This alien note, coming from her, and delivered with such coyness, startled Kimbrough, and he stared at her hard until he took cognizance finally of the spoon in her hand. It was doing more than doodling. It was *dit-dah-ing*. She would touch the tablecloth with its end to simulate a dot, then drag the end a bit to simulate a dash.

"Talking about you is a pleasure," he said inanely, his eyes rigid on the spoon, while a weird smile froze on his lips. "D-O-N-T T-A-L-K," she said with the spoon.

"You're sure it's not just rebound?" she said, raising her brows archly.

She reminded him of Margaret, with that phony expression on her face. But her spoon kept moving.

"Well, a little maybe. But a nice rebound." "M-A-N B-E-H-I-N-D Y-O-U L-I-S-T-E-N-I-N-G," the spoon said. He sighed and continued ingenuously: "I admit it was a surprise to find Maggie was a married wench, for she *did* lead me on when she was in New York, but gentlemen always preferred blondes, and I could learn to be a gentleman." He breathed a heavy sigh at his own dialogue. "Let's finish up, eh?"

They ate in stuffy silence. Before they finished, the man behind him rose, paid the check and left. Paul got a glimpse of the guy. A plump little man with spectacles and a scholarly air, marred only by cherubic cheeks, bright with the bite of cold air. Kimbrough glanced at him casually, but examined his shoes less casually. They had streaks of red clay on the blackness.

AS soon as the man disappeared, Ellen Mitchell said quietly: "It took you long enough to get it. And that Dorothy Dix serenade of yours was strictly off the cob, but I had to stop you. That man is Schustler, head of the engineering school at Southford. It was he hired Nick Rigby. Let's get out of here. I'm afraid."

"What are you afraid of?"

"He listened. I don't like the way he listened. He came in after we did and took that table behind you."

"Schustler—" Paul Kimbrough murmured. "Oh, yes. Rigby was expecting him last night when I arrived at the house in the guise of the panting Lochinvar. I knew the name was familiar. What's his full name?"

"Dr. Richard Schustler," she replied.

"I think," Paul said, "that Schustler is the blithe Homer-quoting assassin who tried to do business on my frail young form last eve. Same stance, same bulk. Oh, well, that's not important right now."

"What are you talking about?"

"Murder," he said. "But solid. You interrupted the *pièce de résistance* when you telephoned. For which, when your progeny call me Daddy one day, you will be everlastingly grateful."

"Don't be glib," Ellen said coolly, annoyed.

"I'm not being glib," he said. "You're for me, and this time it isn't just to make with the dialogue for the benefit of eavesdroppers. Don't argue the point. It's neither the time nor the place. I'd like to borrow your car."

She pursed her mouth and thought.

"Please," he said.

"All right," she said. "It's yours. Out in front of the hotel. Here are the keys. I'll have your direction-finder rigged for you late this afternoon. But if you are only going to use it to take bearings on the enemy signal, that's unnecessary. I have copies of the triangulations Walter Ames made."

"I'd like to see those, but I'll want my own too."

She nodded. "Let's go upstairs."

They went back to her office in the WDHA quarters, and after he had made friends with Cindy, the setter, once more, allowing her to slobber his hands thoroughly and to punch his chest with her forefeet, Ellen gave him the copies of the findings Walt had taken.

The map of Southford was on a large scale, with the surrounding areas well-defined. There was the Spa, there a site called Freeland Hall, which—Ellen explained—was the original site of Southford College back in Revolutionary days; there an *X* with the legend *Deep Caverns*. The Spa was located on the Fox Hill road, of course, but the *X* which marked the entrance of the caverns was to the south on the Chanley Forge pike.

Walter Ames had taken three bearings on the enemy signal. Where the three lines intersected, they formed a miniature triangle. Which meant that the enemy station was located somewhere inside the triangle. The triangle itself covered an area of land only one hundred feet or so; no difficulty respotting the area. But it definitely did not include the old Spa, which was out of the triangle. Ergo, the Spa did not house the transmitting antenna.

"Of course," Kimbrough said, "the Signal Corps transmitter that was stolen from the Army was built to be used by remote control from a distance up to six miles. In fact, the rig could be keyed at two hundred words a minute from that distance, so it could be in the Spa, and the antenna located in the triangle."

Ellen Mitchell smiled enigmatically.

"Old stuff?" Paul said.

"Very," she said. "Almost the exact words Walter Ames said. There is nothing in the Spa—he searched it completely. No secret passages and other gadgets you could dream up. Just an *ante-bellum* hotel, prosaically built. As for the antenna, that isn't something you can hide, you know."

Paul Kimbrough replied: "You mean he couldn't locate the antenna in this triangle?"

"Not a hide. Not a hair. And a quarter wave would be some hundred and thirty feet long, and difficult to conceal."

Paul's eyes glinted. He stretched his legs out. "Do you think you could get that walkie-talkie back from the police?"

"I already have it," she answered unsensationally. "Chief of Police Frankel returned it to me for examination while he informed the Signal Corps of its whereabouts."

"I'll want to borrow that tonight too."

"If you say so," she replied evenly. Then her face clouded. "Paul, you will be careful?"

"I'm being very careful." He picked up her hand-set and rang a number, smiling at her disarmingly. Presently a man said hello.

Paul said: "Senator?"

"Yes, son."

"Still got your walkie-talkie?"

"I have."

"I'm taking one into the field tonight. Please listen for me and stand by for instructions."

There was a wary silence. Daniel Webster cleared his throat. "You know what you're doing?"

"From Alpha to Omega," Kimbrough said. "I expect to be going out around seven, as soon as it darkens."

"Okay," Daniel Webster said.

They hung up. Paul rose gingerly, patted Cindy, grinned at Ellen. "Don't look like a schoolmarm," he said. "Everything is going to be all right. I'll be back around five."

The telephone rang. Ellen answered it. She looked puzzled. "Yes, he is. Just a moment." She turned to him. "For you."

"Me? Who is it?"

"Nick Rigby, I think."

He took the phone from her abruptly. "Hello?"

"Kimbrough? This is Rigby. I'd like a word or two with you. I've been over to the hotel looking for you, and as a matter of fact, I'm in the lobby right now. I've been trying to locate you."

"I'll be at my room in a minute if you want to come up."

"Very well."

Rigby's voice was curt and sullen. Paul replaced the hand-set and smiled vaguely. "I've got to placate an outraged husband," he said to Ellen. His smile went brittle. "And I'm just the guy to do it. See you later."

Chapter Eight

KIMBROUGH went down to his room and dropped himself onto his bed, where he stretched out lazily and lighted a cigarette. When Rigby knocked a few moments later, Paul just called, "Come on in," and did not move. Rigby opened the door and came in, looking pale and uneasy. But his eyes were remote and angry. He stood by the door. He stared at Paul and did not move. For a moment Paul thought he had made the mistake which would cost him his skin, and he unconsciously tensed.

But Rigby finally moved to the foot of the bed and scowled down at him. "May we be frank, Kimbrough?"

"Certainly," Paul nodded. "Have a seat and a cigarette."

"No, thank you."

"Is it about lecturing your classes?"

"No," Rigby said coldly. "As a matter of fact, I retract the offer. If I had known the circumstances of your visit, I wouldn't have made it. . . . Kimbrough, just exactly what goes on between you and Margaret?"

"To be brief, nothing," Paul said.

"You've seen her."

"Yes."

"You came down here to see her. That was a lie about your meeting her harmlessly in New York. You made love to her."

"No," Paul said. "I didn't. And I thought she was unattached at that point."

"You didn't know she was married to me until you arrived here yesterday?" Rigby asked.

"You wouldn't believe that, anyhow. But yes is the answer."

Rigby frowned. "Then why the devil don't you play the game and get out of town? I won't stand for it, you know. I happen to be in love with my wife, and I happen to resent any other man's attentions to her, whether he wears the uniform of an officer and a gentleman, or whether he doesn't."

"Thanks," Paul said dryly. "But I didn't come down to clandestine-romance your wife."

"We said we would be frank."

"I'm being frank," Paul replied. He rose from the bed, went to the closet where his heavy coat hung. He got the stamped 805 transmitting tube from his pocket, and went back to the bed. "I came down for this. Ever see it before, Rigby?"

Rigby stared at it, his jaw slowly dropping. His nervous paleness passed into a whiteness. He looked stunned. He said hoarsely: "Where did you get that?"

"From your effects," Paul said. "How did it get there?"

THE wrath in Nicholas Rigby's face had dissipated, and a panicky look invaded his eyes. He glanced at the tube, then at Paul, then back at the tube. "I teach Signal Corps trainees at the school," he said. "You're aware of that. You're also aware that the Army sends Southford College equipment and gear to work with."

"But not transmitting tubes like 805's," Paul Kimbrough said evenly. "Not a tube that can squirt out three hundred and fifty watts of power. Not for a classroom."

"I haven't anything else to say on the subject," Rigby replied, his voice low and troubled. "Nor am I certain that I am responsible to you in the matter, anyhow. I don't know how the tube got to be among my effects."

"I do," Paul Kimbrough said. "And I think you do. But I won't argue the point. . . . Was there something else, Rigby?"

Rigby shrugged and walked out without another word, closing the door softly behind him.

Paul picked up the telephone and called police headquarters. "I'd like to speak with Chief Frankel, if you please."

"Speaking," said a voice. "How's the Signal Corpse today?"

"Still warm to the touch," Paul replied. "How about a helping hand, Chief?"

"Stretch yourn down first."

"There's a man in town named Richard Schustler."

"Professor at the college, you mean?"

"Yes. You know him obviously. . . . Now, there is also a niece of the Chief of Police in the local telegraph office—right? Could the niece of the Chief of Police inform the Chief as to whether or not there is any undue traffic in telegrams for Dr. Schustler?"

There was a pause. "Reckon so, but I don't know the score exactly. Or am I supposed to?"

"The score is what you make it from the facts involved. I'm only trying to find out how information comes in to Southford. Telegraph is one way, through use of an open code. Registered mail is another, and perhaps a safer and more private medium. But I only want to know as regards Schustler. Anything you could find out, quickly, I would appreciate."

"Hmm," said Chief Frankel eloquently.

"Another thing: These caverns out west of the town. What about them?"

"Shucks, nothing spectacular. Virginia is built on limestone caves; the whole doggone State is honeycombed with 'em. Ever hear of Endless Caverns up at New Market? Or Natural Bridge below us? Natural Bridge, of course, is a cave that lost its sides, that's all. Water cut through the limestone and left a bridge. As for our caverns back of Southford, the geology classes at the college used to explore 'em some, but nobody never explored them all the way. Easy to get lost down in the pitch. Two men died down in there sometime back, just getting lost and falling down into the chasms."

"How many ways in?"

"Just one, over near the Chanley Forge pike. There's a way out, if you like adventure. The caves go down to the bed of the North River, and you can actually swim out of the caves by poking through a tunnel twelve feet long. You come out in the river itself. But it's cold water, and a good way to drown."

"Isn't there a way into the caves from the Spa?"

"Not that I ever knew of. Tom White's boy, Jed—Lord, he's grown and gone to war since then—said he once found an opening into the caves through the old wine-cellar in the bottom of the Spa, but he was scared to investigate. That was years ago, and nobody else ever found the opening he meant, far as I know."

"Thanks," Paul Kimbrough said, electrified. "You'll check with your nosey niece?"

"That's no way to talk about a pipeline," Chief Frankel chuckled. "I'll call you back in a while."

They hung up. Paul Kimbrough began to pace the floor of his room excitedly. What had bothered him was how the devil anyone could have got a stolen BC-365 transmitter down into a maze of caves. The rig weighed six hundred pounds intact, and had not been built to curve around jagged stalagmites.

Of course, the thing had been dismantled, taken down into the caves to a likely spot, then reassembled. That it had been carried piecemeal from the Chanley Forge road all the way underground to a point close to the Spa, two miles away as the mole burrows, was incredible. That it had been dismantled in the privacy of an old wine-cellar under the Spa, and then transported piecemeal a distance of a hundred yards underground (according to Walter Ames' bearings), was not incredible.

Besides, Ames' dying words finally made sense. *"Winezel,"* Ames had said, *"tell him, tell Daniel Webster."* They had all misinterpreted the *"Winezel"* as a man's name. Actually, Ames had been trying to tell them about the wine-cellar, and the entrance to the caverns from it!

"Wine-cellar," Paul thought. "God, I've been stupid!"

At four-thirty, Chief Frankel telephoned back. His voice was bright. "Well, young fella, that was a sober thought of yourn."

"It bore fruit?"

"Lots, son, and all sour. And you covered both alleys at that. Called Charley Gill—he's the local postmaster—and he looked up his registered mail slips, and Dr. Schustler gets a registered once a week, usually the middle of the week. It's been going on since last September, when he came back to school after summer vacation."

"Impossible to know the contents there," Kimbrough said. "But about the telegrams—"

"He gets a telegram most every day," Chief Frankel said. "Angie said—Angie's my niece—Angie said they don't keep copies here, that they keep the copies at the other end where they're filed, but she's got the copies of what Schustler sent back every day. Seems he's a chess-player, and he plays long-distance chess with this friend o' his in Washington. They each set up a game, and then one wires the other what the moves are; one moves, then waits for the other guy to wire back *his* move. Do you follow me?"

"Explicitly," Paul Kimbrough said. "What's the address of the man in Washington?"

CHIEF FRANKEL chuckled. "Funny, but I thought you'd ask that. His name is Arthur Krenz, and here's his office address—and his home address. And I ought to remind you this aint a usual procedure, Angie giving out personal information. She might get fired."

"I'm proud of you, m'boy," Paul said cheerfully. "Thanks for the lift. I get off here."

"I know," the Chief said. "And I'm in the same seat where I was, ignorant as all hell—I mean Hades."

"Soon."

"All right."

Chief Frankel off the wire, Kimbrough put through a person-to-person call to the Chief Signal Officer in Wash-

ington and asked for Captain McLain. The call was expedited, and within a minute, McLain was on the other end.

"This is Kimbrough."

"Well, well, a voice from the sunny South," McLain chuckled.

"Your man is Arthur Krenz," Paul said. "He's the Washington leak. The network of Eastern spies must clear through him, and he forwards the important information which he wishes relayed abroad to Schustler down here, who puts it on the air. Krenz is associated with the State Department. Nab him."

"He is nabbed," said McLain evenly. "But nice going."

"Nabbed? How?"

"Three days ago. The F.B.I. got him. He'd been suspected. When we broke down the code they were using, we checked telegrams he had sent South, and broke down that code too. Merely an open code using chess moves to dictate military movements, and various combinations to name ships. Cleverly done."

Paul Kimbrough said hollowly: "But the station was on the air last night with messages going to DNK, Berlin. Nor was there any attempt by American radios to jam the frequency."

"Why jam?" said McLain. "We wanted it on the air for you to locate it. The telegrams will keep on going to your friend Schustler until you catch him with a key under his fist. In other words, we didn't jam, because the enemy station is now sending false info. We are keeping up a daily supply of misinformation, ostensibly coming from Krenz to Schustler until your job is done."

"Well, for Pete's sake!" Paul exclaimed. "Why didn't you let me in on the secret? Why didn't you tell me about Schustler? I just learned it today."

"Well, for Pete's sake!" said McLain sarcastically. "Why didn't you call in yesterday as you were supposed to, and make a report to me? How the devil am I supposed to know where you are unless you call me?"

"I didn't have time, and I didn't have much to say."

"All right. But don't be mad at *me* for holding back. Krenz was grilled here, and Schustler is not working alone. He's got someone else with him."

"I know that."

"Everything covered?"

Paul said: "I think so."

"Contact your F.B.I. man in Southford?"

"Yes."

"When can you clean it up, sonny-boy?"

"Tonight, I hope," Paul said. "Thanks for all the dope, Mac. See you before the snow melts."

"Try and make it without six white horses pulling a caisson up the hill toward Arlington, will you?"

Kimbrough took a deep breath. "I'll try," he said. "But keep your fingers crossed, anyhow. I'm stupidstitious."

He hung up.

Chapter Nine

AT five-thirty P.M., the light began to go out of the sky, and a garish twilight played upon the snow-covered hills to the west. From his window Kimbrough could see out into the hills almost to the old Spa, hidden from him only by the rise of mountain, which was actually only a hill. He rose to his feet, checked his revolver, then slipped his heavy coat on, and cocked his cap at a strictly non-regulation angle. He took the elevator up to the top floor to the quarters of Radio WDHA, which was in the last throes of its soap-opera broadcasts, piped in from a C.B.S. line.

"I've everything ready for you," Ellen said. "The receiver is here; I had fresh batteries put in the walkie-talkie; the key to my car is on the desk—and is there anything else a girl can do for a wayward soldier?"

"A girl could dine with me," he said.

"In slacks?"

"On you they look good," he said, "though it is true enough that they prove the old adage that a straight line is not the prettiest distance between a hip and heel. You're not concealing a wooden leg, are you? I've never een you dressed like a woman. Last night—at the Spa—which was a hell of a time ago, you were in a ski suit. Today you've been wearing the pants around this radio station. And tomorrow, figuratively, you will still be wearing the pants around the house."

"Whose house?" she said.

"Mine. I go with it."

Ellen smiled and sighed. "That's a complicated way of asking me to dinner, particularly when I was ready and willing."

He grinned. "Any place but the coffee-shoppey downstairs. There must be another—"

"There is, down at Natural Bridge. The Latchstring. Would you like to drive down? It's only nine miles."

"Think we have time?"

"I think so."

"Good," Paul Kimbrough said. "Off we go. You too, Cindy," he added to the red setter, who had risen expectantly and was beating the floor with her tail. "If I'm kind to dumb animals, maybe the girl will forget all about my charming personality."

WHEN he examined the gear, there was less humor in his eyes. The walkie-talkie was shipshape. It was a transceiver, of course, employing the same tube as a regenerative detector, and as a self-excited oscillator. Its power output was about a quarter of a watt, and the telescoping antenna in the rig could be pulled up to its proper length when operating, or—as now—pushed down into the box until it was almost out of sight. The receiver was a portable Hallicrafters, with a radio direction-finding loop atop it, replacing its former straight antenna.

They went down to the street, carrying the gear.

"Conspicuous, aren't you?" Ellen asked nervously.

"Doesn't make any difference," he said. "Except for the walkie-talkie. I stuck that in my coat pocket, inside."

Ellen's car was a gay little convertible, which surprised Paul. "That was Dad's car you saw last night during the storm," she explained. "And don't be silly about it; you're welcome to mine. Only—"

"Only what?" he said.

"Would you let me go along? You'll need help."

"You," Paul said soberly, "are the last person in the world I'd want with me tonight."

The highway had been cleared and was well-matted, as it had been on the drive that morning with the Senator. They reached the Latchstring shortly after six, locked the gear in the car and went inside, Cindy trailing them. She immediately consorted with a male Dalmatian by the fire, made friends, then stretched out to share the open hearth.

It was very pleasant, and time went quickly. Paul could see Ellen growing more and more uneasy. "Seven-fifteen," he said at length. "Time to be getting back to war."

"Paul—" Ellen put her hand on his arm. "Paul, wait."

"What's wrong?"

"Paul—you do know what you're doing?" she asked huskily. "You're not just shooting in the dark—you're not stumbling, hoping—"

Paul grinned broadly. "Between you and the Senator, and a guy named McLain in Washington, I certainly would never get swell-headed. You all make me feel like the barefoot boy with cheeks of tan."

"But it's dangerous," she breathed. "Terribly dangerous! I don't want to be a calamity-howler, but we know

what happened to Walt Ames. It's war, here as well as abroad, and there's no quarter. I'm worried—" She shrugged. "I'm sorry, that's not being much of a help."

"Bless your heart," Paul said. "And thanks for everything. But don't worry."

"But you don't know—"

"I know plenty," he said measuredly. "We'd better be heading back; I'm expecting a phone call soon."

"A tip?"

"Yes."

"Maybe it's come while you were gone," Ellen said, alarmed. "You shouldn't have come down here after all."

"The call won't reach me until I answer it," he replied with an enigmatic smile, "and the tip won't be any good until the call reaches me."

"That sounds crazy."

HE declined to discuss the point further, paid the check, and they trudged through the snow back to the car. This time Cindy diplomatically took the outside of the front seat, and Ellen sat close to him. They said very little going back, each engrossed in thought. The silence affected the dog, who yawned noisily now and then, to try and start the ball rolling.

Paul stopped the car on the outskirts of Southford on a rise which overlooked the Shenandoah Valley stretching northward. The moon hung up over the rim of the evening, and the glow upon the virgin snow was breathtaking. They watched it in silence. Then he cleared his throat. "It's nice," he said huskily.

"It's Virginia," she replied softly.

"Virginia or Connecticut, Scotland or England. Burgundy or the Donets Basin. What's the difference, as long as it's your country? Same the world over. Like love." He glanced at her. "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"No," she said.

"That's a pity," he said. "My mother and dad eloped after they had known each other three days. The gossips keep saying that it won't last. Maybe they're right."

Ellen laughed gently. "Are you making love to me?"

"Sort of," he said. His voice had lost its bantering note. "It's pretty fast, I know, but the times are fast. War does that. Here today and gone tomorrow. A guy doesn't have much time, and a girl has less, I guess; for a girl likes more time to think about it."

"You don't know a thing in the world about me," she said.

"I know everything about you," he said. "And I mean besides that funny tilt to your nose. I learned about you from Cindy. Dogs are like their masters—or mistresses; and Cindy is a sweetheart."

"Paul, you're crazy!" she said, not meaning it.

"No. Not a bit." He shrugged and started the car again. "Of course, on the other hand, you don't know anything about me, because you've got no dog to correlate me on. I could have six wives hanging in a distant closet." He let in the clutch and drove, hoping she would say something, but she remained silent. Soon they came over the hill, and down Main Street. Paul parked the car in front of the hotel and went in with Ellen. The desk clerk halted him.

"There was a party trying to reach you on the telephone, Lieutenant," said the desk-clerk. "You are to call this number as soon as possible."

"Thank you."

He took Ellen up to WDHA's studios in the elevator and left her at the entrance of the station.

"Good-by, Cindy," he said to the setter, scratching her ears. "Take care of the golden girl here."

"That call—" Ellen said, her mouth tight. "Was that your tip?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going, Paul?"

"Oh, probably out the Chanley Forge pike to the caverns. You look anxious."

"I am," she said faintly. "I'm terribly worried." She touched him, then relaxed into his arms, her eyes closed and her lips raised. He kissed her warmly, then held her tightly for a moment.

"See you," he said briefly. He released her and went down to the lobby by way of the staircase; at the desk he instantly picked up the hand-set and called the number which had been left. Margaret Rigby answered immediately.

"Paul!" she breathed tremulously. "Where in heaven's name have you been? I've tried to reach you. I'm at a pay station— I had to leave the house to go out and call you. Nick is going out at seven-thirty, and he wants me to drive him. He said we were going all the way to Chanley Forge on very important business, but I think he's going to the caverns. He was cleaning his gun, and he's been making strange remarks to me all evening. You don't think he found out about me taking that tube?"

"He knows about the tube, yes," Paul said.

"Paul, I'm frightened!"

"Your husband won't touch you," Paul said. "Take him where he wants to go. I'm going to follow."

"Please be careful!"

"Don't worry," he said. "I know what I'm doing. Get back to the house and play it straight."

He hung up, went to the telephone rack and got the local phone-book from it. He looked up a number, went back to the telephone, then decided against it and left the hotel for the street. He got into Ellen's car, started it and drove off. Two blocks away from the Rigby house, he parked.

He took the walkie-talkie from his pocket and extended the antenna to a one-quarter wave-length, then turned on the rig and got out of the car, so that the metal of the machine would not have a shielding effect. The street was empty; it was cold, and the wind curled snow dust up through the ruts.

"QR4, KD3," he said into the carbon microphone after he had switched to TRANSMIT. *"The name of my station is KD3. Are you there? What is your call, please?"*

THERE was a momentary pause as he went back to RECEIVE. He pressed his ear against the single earphone and listened. *"KD3 from KD2,"* a dry voice said, without much volume. *"I've got you, son. I'll be listening from now on. What's the story?"*

"I'm on my way," Paul said. *"Chanley Forge pike. Get in your car and scout the Fox Hill Road, but stay away from the Spa. Just keep within range of this wee transmitter in case things go wrong. Check?"*

"Double check," Daniel Webster said. *"KD2 clear of KD3."*

"KD3 is off the air," Paul said.

He returned to the car and laid the walkie-talkie on the seat. He turned on the portable Hallicrafters and tuned to the frequency which the secret station had used. The air was dead; not even a static crackle came through.

Presently, far down the street, a man and a woman left the Rigby house hurriedly and climbed into the car in the driveway. The car came alive with lights and gas exhaust, backed out of the drive and headed westerly.

Kimbrough waited until they cleared the slope past the college, then he took after them, slowly. He was in no hurry. He let them gain considerably, for they were in an obvious hurry. Finally, far ahead, he saw the lights of the car flicker out, and the car stopped. There was no point in lying back and playing possum, for in the moon-swept snow, visibility was remarkable, and a myopic bat could have perceived him on the fringe of the curve a mile away. He kept on coming, slowly, and he picked up the walkie-talkie.

He said: *"KD3 to KD2. Are you with me?"*

"I'm with you," Daniel Webster said, sounding remote. *"You're weak, but I hear you. I'm on the Fox Hill Road. What cooks?"*

"Stand by a moment," Paul said.

Up across the snow two figures had left the parked car and were climbing a stone-studded hill, thick with trees. He could see their bulk against a white backdrop. Under the peak of the hill, they reached a black gap and disappeared into it.

"Bingo!" Paul said. *"I've got an idea, Senator. Never mind keeping contact at the moment. Head back to town, and rouse the Chief of Police. Put a guard at the Spa, down in the wine-cellar. Make certain they're armed. Frankel knows where the wine-cellar is. Got it?"*

"KD2 returning. I've got it. Over."

"Further instructions," Paul Kimbrough said coolly. *"Another group of armed police are to cover the Chanley Forge entrance to Deep Caverns at once, arresting anybody who attempts to leave. That goes for the Spa end too. Our babies are boxed underground right now. There is no other way out but those two gaps, and the river."*

"Won't they try the river?"

"No," Paul said. *"They won't. But when they break, they are going to break fast. I'm going to smoke them out."*

"Those caves," replied Daniel Webster, *"go through plenty of earth, and they're aërated. How can you smoke them out?"*

"Where are they getting power for that transmitter?" Paul said. *"She draws a thousand watts of power at least. Are they piping it in from hot lines on poles?"*

"No," Daniel Webster said. *"They're probably using a gasoline generator."*

"And a gas generator," Paul said, *"requires an exhaust to feed the carbon monox topside. Follow me?"*

"I do. I'll head right back. Nice work. KD2 off."

"KD3 off," Paul said. *"Listen for me when you return. I may need you badly."*

"Okay."

Chapter Ten

PAUL stepped on the gas, roared Ellen's convertible past the parked car and continued on until he rounded an S-turn, which put him out of sight. A deserted gasoline station was ahead, a victim of OPA gasoline restrictions, and he turned beyond it and parked the car on the western side, so that it could not be observed from the hill where the cave mouth was located. He locked it, got out, carrying the Hallicrafters receiver. He trudged into the snow, up the hill, taking it carefully and quietly, and using whatever cover the trees afforded.

When he reached the top of the hill, he found a rock behind which he placed his receiver, the gain-control turned low. He knelt here awhile, and watched the mouth of the cave below him, taking care to observe his rear and flanks frequently to forestall an ambush. Nothing happened for a long time, and he put his impatience down, remembering that *they* would be more impatient. . . . He was right.

At eight-ten a figure emerged warily from the cavern mouth and stared down at the road. It was Schustler.

"Where is he?" Schustler said angrily. "It was going to be so easy."

The reply, coming from within the cave, was muffled, and Kimbrough could not hear it.

Schustler shrugged. "You will have to remain here and wait. I have information to put on the air, and the schedule is for eight-thirty tonight. In the name of God, Rigby, be careful. He is not as stupid as he looks."

Paul made a wry mouth as Schustler moved back into the cave, and he settled himself for a wait. He left off watching the cave so sharply, and peered down the northern side of the ridge, where he could faintly discern the chimneys of the old Spa, a good mile to his left. The Spa itself was hidden under the lip of the hill, down in the valley where Fox Hill Road ran.

SOON he heard an alien sound in the stillness of the night—the stuttering and monotonous *putt-putt* of an engine exhaust. It was followed by the scent of gasoline fumes. He wet his finger to test the wind, found it northerly, then picked up his receiver and trudged the snow in the face of the wind.

The fumes grew stronger as he tracked them to their source. The old Spa came in sight under the hill as he approached closer to it atop the ridge. Then he spotted the spasmodic bursts of white smoke which stood out in relief only because they were backed by the darker bulk of trees. He reached the smoke, found it emanating from a rigid pipe which rose only a bare foot above the snow level. Around the pipe, the snow had blackened from the exhaust.

Kimbrough sat down to windward and turned up the gain of his receiver, tuning it across the frequency. A radio note became audible instantly, keyed at twenty words a minute by an expert hand. It was very readable telegraphy, even if in code groups which did not make sense without a code key. The signal was so strong that it blocked the receiver when Paul swung the direction-finding loop around. The nulls were barely noticeable. He was right at the antenna, somehow.

Leaving the receiver, he took a lead pencil from his pocket and stared at the trees around him. They all looked real enough in the moonlit dark. None of them showed a horizontal antenna against the sky.

"So," he thought, "it's a vertical antenna, and one of these is it." The ridge was definitely not dense with trees, and capable of thorough exploration. He chose those which were thin and scraggly, touching the lead of his pencil against each one as he progressed. He had no luck until he finally reached a thick maple, beyond which was something akin to a bamboo, a straight rigid shoot which went up at least seventy feet, neither crooked nor bumpy.

When he touched his pencil to it, a fiery little arc leaped from this "tree" and hung in space between the end of the pencil and the "wood." He put the pencil away, took a bone-handled penknife from his pocket, threw the light of a small flashlight on the pole and scraped the brown skin with the blade. The gleam of duralumin showed through. He had located the antenna of the station underground.

Elated, Kimbrough returned to the exhaust spout. It was only two inches across the diameter. He pulled his scarf from his throat and jammed it down into the hole, feeling the hot breath of exhaust through his gloves. He jammed it down tightly, found a stick with which to tighten it further. Some smoke leaked through, but very little. The rest of the exhaust would backtrack to its source, a gasoline generator, where it would leak from the exhaust hose and fog up the cavern below.

A dog barked. Paul Kimbrough cocked his head and listened. The dog barked again, was in fact barking continuously, but only audibly on the drop of the wind, for the sound was downwind. Paul ran to his rock, looked down at the cavern mouth. Nothing there. He raised his eyes to the distant road where the Rigby car was parked. A second car was parked behind it. That was where the barking dog barked from. Paul repressed a groan. The car was the same black sedan which had

taken him from the Spa on his arrival in the snowstorm the preceding night. The car belonging to Dr. Mitchell. The dog was obviously Cindy.

For a moment Paul thought, mystified, that Dr. Mitchell himself had made a visit to the cavern. Then he slid from the rock and incautiously came down from the ridge to the cave mouth, where he examined the prints in the snow. Over there, a man and a woman had walked together. Over here—

His heart fell. A woman had walked alone. Ellen's footprints came up to the mouth of the cave and disappeared into it.

He stood to one side of the cavern's mouth, shivering. This was the exigency on which he had not planned. Up to then he had felt almost smug, for he felt he had handled it well. The enemy agents were trapped underground, with only two exits open to them, both to be pincered by police. The game was done; he did not even have to venture into the darkness of the chasms of limestone to seize his station. He had only to wait until coldness and dampness and hunger drove the quarry topside to arrest; then, at leisure, the cave could be explored for the missing transmitter.

Ellen had spoiled all that. He thought: "Why the devil did she do it?" She had gone into the dark looking for him, and she had given Dr. Schustler a splendid hostage.

PAUL moved into the mouth of the cave, crouching low. The moonlight died on the sill, and infinite hollows beyond vanished into a pitch blackness which seemed real enough to cut. He had to go down there. But where? The maze would not be penetrated by good intentions. There were abysses, chasms, turns, twists, dead-end pockets. Men had died in these caves, lost beyond return to an exit. He listened. The only sound he heard was the slow steady drip of water on the rocks, steadfastly hollowing the formations into further caverns; the musical *phipp-phipp* had the sound of centuries in it.

Down on the road, the setter barked frantically, continuously. Paul stepped from the cave again and stared down the hill moodily.

Cindy!

Electrified, he started running. He labored through the heavy snow, panting, exposing himself recklessly in the moonlight. When he reached the car, the setter threw herself at the window happily. He opened the door and grabbed Cindy's lead. She devoured him with affection and gratitude, no longer noisy.

"Cindy, old girl," he said, his voice hoarse with heavy breathing and expectation, "we're going to find Ellen."

Cindy wagged cheerfully and watched him sharply.

"Ellen!" he said. "Go find Ellen!"

He pulled her to the snow where Ellen's first footprints began their schematic way up the hill.

"Ellen! Find Ellen!"

Cindy sniffed at the print, then whined and began to tug at her lead. Elated, Paul gave her her head, and they both ran. At the cavern, Paul held the dog back, to catch his breath, but Cindy was eager to get inside. There were inherent dangers in the situation from here on in, he knew, for he had to use a flashlight and thus make a target of himself. But there was no choice at all.

"All right, old girl," he said with a sigh. "Take it easy. One more thing to do."

He extracted his walkie-talkie from his pocket, extended the antenna, turned it on. *"KD3 to KD2. Are you back with me?"*

There was no reply.

He waited for an interminable minute. Then, *"KD3 to KD2. Are you monitoring me again? Over."*

With relief, he heard the push of a carrier dampen the regenerative rush in his earphone. *"KD2 to KD3,"* Daniel Webster said faintly. *"Can barely hear you. Go ahead."*

"Where are you?"

"We're heading out Fox Hill Road. Transmitting from the car as I come."

"New instructions," Paul said sharply. *"Ellen Mitchell is in the caves, and I'm going after her from the Chanley Forge end. You are to go to the old wine-cellar in the Spa, try to find another opening into the cave. I'm certain the transmitter is located somewhere near the wine-cellar, underground. Watch yourself, and come in. Flank them from that side. May need you badly. Over."*

"Don't do it," Daniel Webster replied firmly. *"They won't touch her if she's hostage."*

"Can't take the chance. Just follow instructions. Good luck, Senator. KD3 off and clear of KD2."

The Senator came back: *"You're doing just what they want you to do, you young fool! Come back to me."*

Paul shrugged and left his dial on RECEIVE.

"KD2 to KD3," Daniel Webster said wearily. *"I'll follow instructions. Be careful. Good luck. Off."*

"All right, Cindy," Paul Kimbrough murmured. The walkie-talkie he left strapped to his free hand. In his left hand, which held the dog's lead, he held his flash, turning it on. "For better or worse, here we go."

Sometimes, it was a fairyland, and sometimes it was the stark Stygian cave which housed the Styx. Sometimes, the pale light of the flash illumined strange beauties, the varicolored stalactites which hung gracefully from the arcing domes of the caverns, dripping pale blue drops of water, or the brusque crude thrust of the thick stalagmites out of the rocky floor. Most of the time it was treacherous going, the limestone covered with a layer of red clay which did not even offer the hard surface of ice for traction. The labyrinth wound on. It crossed gaping black chasms. Paul dropped a loose stone into one, and heard the stone ricochet endlessly from wall to wall as it dropped into the earth. Some passageways between minor amphitheaters were so narrow that he had to squeeze his body through them sidewise; some openings so meager that he had to cat-crawl them. It was not cold, the temperature constant at fifty-eight degrees Fahrenheit, and the air was fresh.

AT first Kimbrough tried to remember his route, so that he could retrace it. But inevitably the monotony of the caverns confused him, and soon he was completely lost. He gripped the dog firmly, aware now that his life depended on her fine nose, for without it, even Cindy would have foundered in the endless twists and turns. A dog's nose and a warm trail were all Paul had. There were bad moments when he wondered whether Cindy might be on the spoor of a fat rabbit which had holed up here, but the results of such a mistake were so enormous, he could not consider them. . . .

It took forever. Finally, with Cindy still straining to go ahead, he paused to rest. The dog lost her elation, without warning, and growled, deep back in her throat. She retreated to Paul's knee as he leaned against the craggy walls.

Kimbrough stood erect. "Something ahead, sweetheart?" He flashed the light, but it only revealed another passageway, and another cavern room beyond. Cindy was reluctant to move ahead, but he prodded her with the walkie-talkie's antenna, and she moved, skulking.

At the end of the passageway he could hear his steps echo, and he realized he was in an amphitheater of some size.

Simultaneously, the cold damp barrel of a pistol was thrust against the back of his neck, and Dr. Schustler's voice said mildly: "Stand perfectly still, Kimbrough, or I'll kill you."

Paul gasped involuntarily at the essence of surprise. But as soon as Schustler had spoken, the hackles deflated at the back of his neck, and his heart slowed down. Now that it was here, he was no longer afraid. He had only been afraid that he would not reach Schustler and Rigby alive. He

had only worried that a bullet in the dark might fell him before he could spring the trap.

"I'm standing perfectly still," he said. "There's a gun in a belly holster, a flashlight in my left hand, and a transceiver in my right. Don't hurt the setter."

"You're a very ingenious fellow," Schustler said acidly, no longer tolerant. "I believe I made that remark to you last night at your hotel room before you tried to shoot me. But we're done with that." He moved away. "Rigby—the gas-lamp!"

A match flared; and over its corona, Kimbrough saw the face of Margaret Rigby. Then the brilliance of a gasoline lamp blossomed, and the whole stone room became marked with detail.

The missing Signal Corps transmitter in its seven-foot zinc-coated cabinet, stood at the rear wall, beside a small desk, on which sat an HRO, one of the finest receivers in the world. On a table near by was stacked a wealth of material, tubes in a tube-rack, other receivers, and test equipment, obviously out of Walter Ames' F.C.C. Radio Intercept car. The desk beside the big transmitter had a fine clock, and a semi-automatic wireless key on it, along with a log and papers. To the far left of the transmitter, on a small couch, Nick Rigby sat, his hands tied behind his back, his feet tied together. He looked miserable. On the far right of the transmitter, her hands tied to the arms of the small folding chair in which she sat, Ellen watched him with tragic eyes.

ONLY Margaret Rigby seemed at ease as she moved from the gasoline lamp. In her hand he caught the bright flash of nickel. She was holding a small short-barreled revolver, and smoking a cigarette.

"Hello, darling," she said with a contemptuous smile. "Surprised?"

"Not very much," Kimbrough said, not smiling. "You'd have to have been a much better actress to make your innocent misunderstood wife-of-a-brute rôle stick." He could feel Schustler's hands frisking him expertly. Schustler took the belly gun and the walkie-talkie, and Paul made no attempt to resist.

"Listen to him," Margaret Rigby laughed, amused. "He knew it all the time."

"Not all the time," Kimbrough said. "I didn't know about Schustler all the time. But I knew you were in it, and working with someone. I knew it wasn't your husband. You weren't as clever as you thought. For instance, that business of stealing out tonight to call me from a pay station and tip me on your husband's intentions. Good Lord, lady, you left me the number for me to call back. I looked up your home telephone number in the directory, and it was the same thing. In other words, you hadn't gone out to a pay station at all!"

"Yes," Schustler said bitterly, staring at her. "You are so brilliant, Rigby, you stagger your own imagination."

Margaret Rigby flushed and bit her lip.

"Oh, it was more than just the number," Paul said conversationally to Schustler. "Where do you want me, incidentally?"

"Over with Mr. Rigby," Schustler said. "While I make some decisions here."

Paul went to the couch and sat down beside Rigby who never even looked at him. Rigby watched his wife in incredulity.

"You were saying?" Schustler said.

"That it was more than just the telephone number. Yes." Paul placed his hands together, palm to palm, like a professor addressing a class. He felt cool despite his pounding heart. "Don't you think it was more than coincidence that a girl like Margaret, who attached herself to a Signal Corps officer like myself when I was in New York, and asked so many questions which were none of her business, should have resided oddly enough in a small Virginia town where a Signal Corps transmitter was mysteriously stolen, some weeks later?"

Schustler looked stony, no change of expression.

"The possibility of a tie-up was obvious," Paul said. "It seemed wise to use her as my alibi for a visit here. If she were in the know, I would be quick to learn it. If not, I had a really innocent excuse for being around such a hot spot. She gave herself away the very first moment I saw her—as you did, Schustler, in the restaurant."

"In what way, Lieutenant?" Schustler asked.

"Red clay. She had a smudge of it on her stockings when I walked into her house. You had it on your shoes when I saw you at lunch today while you eavesdropped."

"Virginia is covered with red clay. That proved nothing," Schustler said.

"It proved everything. Virginia may be made of red clay, but when you have five inches of snow on a frozen surface, it is difficult to get smudged with red clay mud unless you are underground."

Margaret Rigby cried hotly: "You're a fraud! You're trying to talk your way out of here! If you had known all this, you would never have come down."

"Wait," Schustler said, his voice quietly sharp. "You talk too much. What is the situation, Kimbrough? Did you sacrifice your well-planned movement because Miss Mitchell fell in with—ah—thieves?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes," Kimbrough said.

Ellen started to speak, then turned her head away.

"Nevertheless," Paul said, "the game is over. And you have lost, Schustler."

"I have?"

"I think so. You can't send information with an exhaust-pipe stuffed." He slitted his eyes and added a lie. "I grounded your antenna to earth topside; you'll get no r.f. into the air. The police are guarding both the wine-cellar exit at the Spa, and the Chanley Forge pike exit. Sooner or later you're bound to get hungry."

"I have two hostages," Schustler said, his face pallid.

"Three," Paul said. "There's poor Rigby, who played the fool and tried to protect a wife who happened to be a German agent."

"Three, then."

"They won't do you any good. Show me how."

"Your life against mine," Schustler said.

"You wouldn't trust the police to make a bargain with you."

There was a silence. Then Margaret cried: "Schustler! Are we trapped? My God, they'll kill us, they'll hang us for espionage—"

"Shut up," Schustler said measuredly, his eyes glinting as he watched her. "I want to think. Watch them." He walked to the desk and sat down. He stared at the desk. Then he sighed and glanced at the walkie-talkie. "I haven't seen one of these before. Ultra high-frequency transmitter, eh? I suppose Ames called for help on one of these after I shot him."

"The same one."

"Very ingenious," Schustler murmured. "Some one is waiting above ground to hear your report on it?"

"Yes. Turn it to RECEIVE and listen. My friend, who happens to be a special agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, may be calling me."

SCHUSTLER cleared his throat. He turned on the set, and even at a distance of six feet Paul Kimbrough could hear the noisy rippling whistling which emanated from the single ear-phone like static. No voice came from the set, calling KD3. Just the whistle, wobbly and penetrating.

Instantly Schustler turned off the set and tossed it on the desk. He rose from the chair with his pistol in his hand, and he walked quickly to Margaret.

Margaret said, afraid: "What's wrong? What is it?"

"Quiet," he said. He wrenched her revolver from her hand, and pushed her abruptly toward her bound husband. His eyes were cold.

"Schustler!" she breathed hoarsely, terror in her face.

"The fortunes of war," Schustler said. "I'm leaving you behind with the others. Very clever of you, Kimbrough; but I too knew what a regenerative whistle is. Your F.B.I. friend is very close. The sound we heard is the sound of his receiver oscillating. He is that close. So I must be going."

"How?" Kimbrough said, his back beginning to chill.

"The river," said Schustler. "You forgot the river. I am perfectly capable of swimming it."

"No good," Paul said quickly, his mind racing. "They got Krenz in Washington. Your identity is known."

"But I am not taken," Schustler snapped, "and do not intend to be taken."

"Take me with you!" Margaret Rigby cried. "You're not going to leave me behind?"

"Dead," Schustler said. He raised his gun into Paul's face. Across the room Cindy—who had been listening to Ellen's soft words—started on a run as Ellen said briefly: *"Go get him!"*

Cindy made the run noisily, her growl echoing in the cavern. Schustler could not restrain a half-turn to protect himself. As he shifted his eyes, Kimbrough braced his hands on the edge of the couch and launched his feet up and out for he was too far away to engage Schustler any other way. His well-placed kick fell a trifle short because of the distance, and instead of the judo-blow against Schustler's kneecap, the point of Paul's shoe hit hard into the shin, a painful blow which sent Schustler to a knee, but did not drop the gun from his hand.

PAUL had two visions: One was of gun-fire, sharp and terrible, amplified by the cavern itself; and for a moment, he thought the dog had been killed. The other was of Margaret Rigby's white face as she dashed into the thin passageway through which he had come from the Chanley Forge pike entrance. She disappeared into the blackness beyond.

The dog was not hit. She passed at Schustler's shoulder as she hit him, and lost her balance, rolling over several times. Schustler struggled to his feet in a Herculean effort, his mouth bloodless.

"Senator!" Kimbrough shouted. "For the love of heaven!"

There was one more shot, but it did not come from the Schustler pistol. This one came from the darkness, its flash visible far behind the bullet which broke Schustler into a heap and crumpled the man to the stone floor face down, his gun dropping to the limestone beside him.

Paul moved to him to turn him over, but Daniel Webster's voice, preceding him out of the shadows beyond the cavern, called calmly: "Don't touch him. Let him lie that way—he won't be pretty."

"He may be alive," Paul called.

Daniel Webster, a trifle muddy, but withal still neat and composed, emerged into the cavern from the northern end, his walkie-talkie strapped to his left hand, his right hand free, for he had returned his gun to its holster.

"He's not alive," said the Senator rather quizzically. "You never pull a gun unless you intend to shoot someone, and you never shoot anyone unless you mean to kill them. He's dead, take my word for it. Where did she go?"

"That way. I'll help you."

"You stay and untie the others. Is she armed?"

"No. I'll go with you."

"All right," Daniel Webster sighed.

They eased into the passageway and followed it, using flashlights. They had not gone very far before they came to the first chasm—and they did not proceed beyond it. A woman's shoe lay on one side of the gaping black hole, and on the muddy rim of the hole, the imprint of human hands clawing for support were obvious.

Kimbrough shuddered and turned away.

Daniel Webster knelt there speculatively. He murmured; "She could have faked the set-up here, of course; but on the other hand, she won't get past the guards at the other end, and she didn't have a light, did she? How far down do these potholes go?"

"God knows," Paul said.

"God—and Mrs. Rigby now," Daniel Webster replied more solemnly. "There are no footprints on the other side. Even she couldn't have done as well as that. . . . People can be the damnedest fools, can't they?"

Paul said hoarsely: "Things didn't turn out quite the way I thought they would, Senator."

"Didn't they?" Daniel Webster murmured. "But then they never do, son. They never do. They always go astray. That's why I was around. I've been at it longer than you. But you did pretty well for an amateur, Lieutenant. Let's get back."

IT was midnight before Ellen, Cindy and Paul were shuttled to the deserted gasoline station where he had parked her car. One of the police was driving her father's car into town, and the rest of the party, with the exception of the stationed guards, had already departed.

"Wait here," Paul told her. "I'll be right back."

He went up the snowy hill and recovered the portable receiver which he had left up there by the exhaust pipe. When he returned, he could see by her glistening eyes that she had been crying; and Cindy, reflecting her mistress's mood, was subdued.

Paul got in and pushed the dog, which had taken center-seat, over to the other side. "I've got things to say to the lady," he told Cindy, "so don't stare at me with those sad eyes." He started the engine and let it warm.

"Well?" he said. "You nearly ruined everything. I hope you have a good reason."

"I haven't," she said. Her mouth quivered. "Oh, Paul, I *am* sorry. I wanted to help, I was frantic about you. I got you into it, you know, it was my fault you were down here at all. I got Walter Ames into it, I was responsible for—"

"Shush," he said severely, "don't talk like a child. If you mean you got us into it by monitoring that station first and reporting it to F.C.C. as any normal American girl would have, you're nuts. Schustler started it by being a bad boy. But you shouldn't have come."

"You were going into the caves, not knowing anything about them. I'd been down through them some. I knew them a little. I thought I could help show you the way."

"All because you felt responsible for a poor soldier?"

Her eyes fell. "No."

He smiled adamantly. "Why then?"

"I—" She stopped, and a gentle smile flickered across her lips. "Will you be leaving Southford right away?"

"Not for a couple of days," he said. "I've got to arrange to get that rig out of the cavern. It'll take a little time to dismantle and crate. Daniel Webster will handle the rest of the details, the criminal stuff. But I'll be around long enough for a girl to settle her affairs and pack a trousseau or whatever it is brides pack, all contingent, of course, on whether a girl wanted to be a bride and live in a screwy city like Washington until her soldier got the nod for overseas service—"

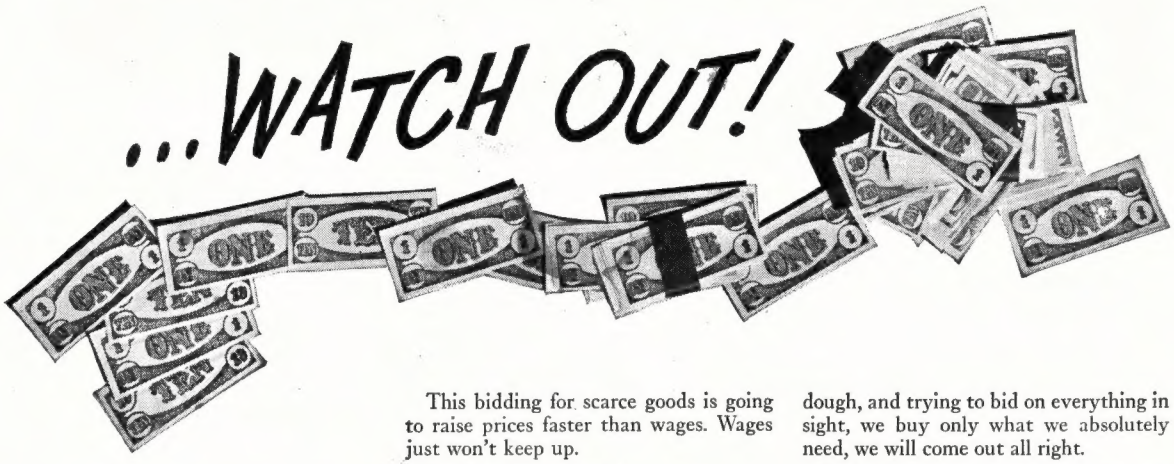
"Paul," she said, mimicking him, "do you believe in love at first sight?"

He let the engine run and did not make a reply. He put his arms around her and kissed her often and expertly.

"The Mystery at Heron House," a complete book-length novel by Kerry O'Neil, who wrote "Mooney's in a Jam," is scheduled for our next issue.

IF YOU'RE MAKING MORE MONEY

...WATCH OUT!



WE WANT TO WARN YOU, before you read this page, that you've got to use your head to understand it.

We also want to warn you that—if you don't bother to read it carefully enough to understand it—you may wake up after this war as poor as a church mouse.

* * *

This year Americans are going to make —minus taxes—125 billion dollars.



But this year, we civilians are not going to have 125 billion dollars' worth of goods to spend this on. We're only going to have 80 billion dollars' worth. The rest of our goods are being used to fight the war.

That leaves 45 billion dollars' worth of money burning in our jeans.

Well, we can do 2 things with this 45 billion dollars. One will make us all poor after the war. The other way will make us decently prosperous.

This way the 45 billion dollars will make us poor

If each of us should take his share of this 45 billion dollars (which averages approximately $330 per person) and hustle out to buy all he could with it—what would happen is what happens at an auction where every farmer there wants a horse that's up for sale.

If we tried to buy all we wanted, we would bid the prices of things up and up and up. Instead of paying $10 for a dress we're going to pay $15. Instead of $5 for a pair of shoes we're going to pay $8.

This bidding for scarce goods is going to raise prices faster than wages. Wages just won't keep up.

So what will people do?

U. S. workers will ask for more money. Since labor is scarce, a lot of them will get it. Then farmers and business men who



feel the pinch are going to ask more money for their goods.

And prices will go *still higher*. And the majority of us will be in that same old spot again—only worse.

This is what is known as Inflation.

Our government is doing a lot of things to keep prices down . . . rationing the scarcest goods, putting ceiling prices on things, stabilizing wages, increasing taxes.



But the government can't do the *whole job*. So let's see what *we* can do about it.

This way the 45 billion dollars will make us prosperous

If, instead of running out with our extra dough, and trying to bid on everything in sight, we buy only what we absolutely need, we will come out all right.

If, for instance, we put this money into (1) Taxes; (2) War Bonds; (3) Paying off old debts; (4) Life Insurance; and (5) The Bank, we don't bid up the prices of goods at all. And if besides doing this we (6) refuse to pay more than the ceiling prices; and (7) ask no more for what we have to sell—no more in wages, no more for goods—*prices stay where they are now.*

And we pile up a bank account. We have our family protected in case we die. We have War Bonds that'll make the down payment on a new house after the war, or help us retire some day. And we don't have taxes after the war that practically strangle us.



Maybe, doing this sounds as if it isn't fun. But being shot at up at the front isn't fun, either. You have a duty to those soldiers as well as to yourself. You *can't* let the money that's burning a hole in your pocket start setting the country on fire.

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KEEP PRICES DOWN!

Use it up
Wear it out
Make it do
Or do without

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